AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

CAIRO'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL: AFRICAN-ASIAN SOLIDARITY, MODERNITY AND COUNTER-CULTURAL PROJECTS IN THE AGE OF NASSER

by
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// ABSTRACT
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Title: Cairo's First International Film Festival: African-Asian Solidarity, Modernity and Counter-Cultural Projects in the Age of Nasser

The second edition of the Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) took place in Cairo in 1960. It was organized by the ministry of culture in the framework of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and was the first international film festival to ever happen in Cairo. This thesis is based on archival research examining magazines, daily newspapers, biographies and films, engaging with historical possibilities that this festival offers in the present.

Gamal Abdel Nasser's domestic and foreign policies placed Cairo at the center of both the Arab and the African-Asian sphere. I first demonstrate as my main thesis that the AAFF offered a space for two ideologies, pan-Arabism and African-Asian anti-colonial solidarity, to overlap within the framework of the AAFF. Second, by taking two films screened at the AAFF as case studies, I demonstrate how gender was used particularly in Egyptian cinema for the advancement of nationalism and of a modernity that would represent Cairo as a progressive nation-state. Third, I turn towards the negative press reviews around the festival revealing that the first international film festival to be held in Cairo was expected to compete with film festivals globally and showing a clear aspiration for modernity and progress in 1960s Nasserist Cairo, that the AAFF failed to achieve. Fourth and finally, I demonstrate connections between the Cairo AAFF and the African-Asian anti-colonial movement more broadly, tracing the historical trajectory of cinema and culture in an era of anti-imperialist struggle. I argue that the AAFF laid the foundations for the later emergence of cultural resistance beyond Africa and Asia, namely Third Cinema.

My main conclusion is that despite the limitations imposed by a state-sponsored event, Egypt through Nasserism enabled a space for African-Asian cultural enactment of anticolonialism and Third World solidarity. The historical tracing of cinema and culture in an era of anti-imperialist struggle demonstrates how the AAFF allowed for the emergence of counter-cultural projects. This film festival opens up questions and possibilities about history, about knowledge production and about memory.

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All Arabic to English translations are my own unless stated otherwise. A simplified system of transliteration was used for Arabic in this thesis. Diacritics were omitted for non-Roman letters, with the exception of apostrophes used to indicate ayn (‘) and hamzah (’).

For some proper names of well-known figures, I used the conventional English usage. This includes the name of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir). I have also used preexisting English transliterations for any author whose work I’m citing in English.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On February 29, 1960, the front cover of the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram* announced the opening of the second edition of the Afro-Asian Film Festival to be held in Cairo. The announcement featured the festival logo, similar to the one featured on the festival poster (Illustration 1). The logo was that of a film roll wrapping the African and Asian continents, signifying the unity that this event aspired to in the wake of anti-colonial liberation. The emphasis on cinema, visually represented in the embracing film reel, shows the important role culture played within this solidarity movement emerging at the time. A fire-like halo around the wrapped continents symbolizes both the flame of the resistance movement and that of a new function for cinema that was on the rise. The visual clearly demonstrates how this film festival was to be different, that it would both engage politics and culture. The text in *al-Ahram* announced that the festival will be screening the latest productions from all over Africa and Asia with the presence of some of the stars of the films. More importantly, however, the announcement stated that this is the first international film festival to take place in Cairo and "the festival's success is a great national victory for the country" (N/A 1960e: 1). What was this African-Asian film festival? How did it come to be the first international film festival to take place in Cairo? And why was its success considered an important national triumph?

Five years prior to this event, in 1955, an international conference took place in Bandung, Indonesia uniting twenty-nine countries from Africa and Asia. At the height of the Cold War and within the framework of a post-World War Two (WWII) international order, the Bandung Conference participants were leaders of emergent nation-states that had newly gained their independence from colonialism, while others were representatives of anti-colonial struggles for liberation. Opposing colonialism and imperialism was a shared conviction among all delegates. Historian Christopher Lee (2010) argues that the conference allowed for the emergence of what was referred to as the "Bandung Spirit." He defines this as "the feeling of political possibility presented through this first occasion of 'Third World' solidarity" (15). The importance of this conference was therefore in laying a foundation for the emergence of an African-Asian anti-colonial movement, one based on a south-south network of solidarity. Vijay Prashad, in his book, *The Darker Nations: A History of the Third World* (2007), elaborates the meaning of a Third World as a project during the Cold War. He defines this project as both an ideology and a set of institutions demanding equality that emerged "[d]uring the seemingly interminable battles against colonialism, [when] the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America dreamed of a new world" (xv). In this thesis, I use the term Third World instead of other terminologies such as the Global South. The reason for this is because the Third World was a positive term at the time, signifying a common vision of a new world order and nations capable of self-determination and historical agency.[1]

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[1] In his book, Prashad explains the origin of the term Third World as being based on the French economist Albert Sauvy's writings. Sauvy, Prashad argues, wrote regularly in a paper called *L'Observateur* that advanced anticolonial thought in France. In one of Sauvy's articles, he explains "an evocative tripartite division of the planet into the First, Second, and Third Worlds" (p. 6). The basis of such divisions for Sauvy were the First Estate (clergy), Second Estate (aristocracy) and Third Estate (bourgeoisie) that existed during the French monarchy prior to 1789. When the French revolution took place, the Third Estate was transformed into the National Assembly. This parallelism between the Third Estate and Third World, Prashad argues, is indeed used by Sauvy to mark the case for the sovereignty and determination of the latter: "In the same way, the Third World would speak its mind, find the ground for unity, and take possession of the dynamic of world affairs. This was the enlightened promise of the Third World" (p. 11). See Vijay Prashad, 2007, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press), pp. 6-11.

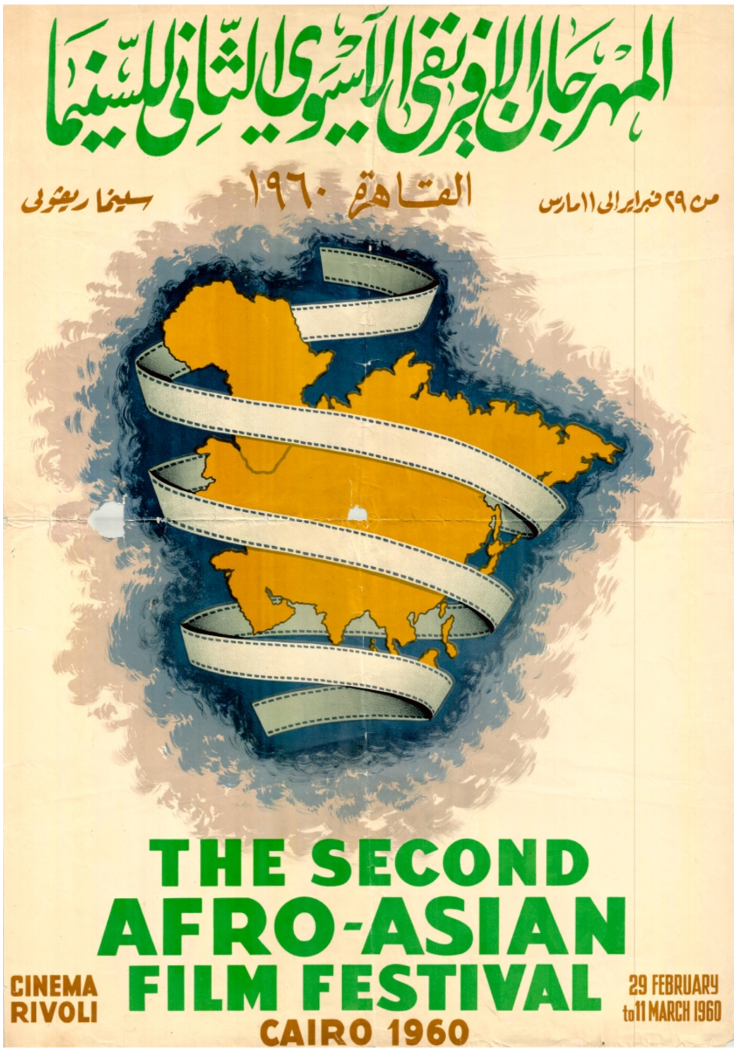

Illustration 1 – Second Afro-Asian Film Festival poster, Cairo 1960. Source: Abboudi Abou Jaoudeh Collection, Beirut.

The literature on the African-Asian anti-colonial movement has been for the most part focused on the Bandung Conference as a pivotal event, highlighting the political and diplomatic aspect of its strong show of state-led, top-down solidarity. Early accounts of the African-Asian movement drew a linear historical description of the origins of the Third World project, and combined themes that range in scope from Communism to the Non-Aligned Movement (see, e.g. Boutros-Ghali and Dreyfus 1969, Queuille 1965). These earlier accounts of the Afro-Asian movement, penned by male diplomats, construct a historical sequence of political events typical of histories of the Cold War. However, new and emergent literature acknowledges Bandung as essentially political theater, with the focus being not on the gatherings of political elites but on peoples' solidarity (Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective 2018, Stolte 2019).[2] Seeking to position itself as a sequel to Bandung, the first conference of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) was held in Cairo in 1957. The AAPSO "proved to have even wider reach than the Bandung meeting itself, by including a range of political and cultural organizations as opposed to official delegates from African and Asian states [only]" (Lee 2010: 17).

Beyond the top-down African-Asian diplomatic coalition of nation-states and statesmen, AAPSO produced a transnational network of exchange between non-state actors. It generated multiple political and cultural associations to strengthen solidarity between Africans and Asians.[3] Some of AAPSO's initiatives include the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, the Afro-Asian Federation for Women, the Afro-Asian Youth Movement and the Afro-Asian Film Festival, among others. Thus, African and Asian nation-states enabled an arena where non-state actors such as activists and artists were given a space to exercise their political agency. Egypt was one country that particularly emphasized African-Asian transnational solidarity and that played a central role in

[2] The historian Carolien Stolte argues that Bandung was political theater and that the real south-south peoples' solidarity conference had in fact taken place in New Delhi eleven days prior to the Bandung Conference. See Carolien Stotle, 2019, "The People's Bandung: Local Anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian Stage," *Journal of World History*, vol. 30, no. 1-2: 125-156.

[3] In "Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa," the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective emphasize "communication and solidarity across difference" as central to the Afro-Asian movement. On the one hand, they advocate for a more inclusive history that examines south-south relations between non-state actors. On the other hand, they detail a methodology that relies on interdisciplinary, collaborative and multi-lingual research that challenges traditional academic methodologies, and approach decolonization from the view of the Global South. See Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, 2018, "Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa," *Radical History Review,* vol. 131: 176-192.

creating a hub for activists (Abou-El-Fadl 2019). This was possible as a result of the leading role that Gamal Abdel Nasser, the post-British monarchy era leader of Egypt, played within the African-Asian anti-colonial movement, and the boost to his standing after his nationalization of the Suez Canal (Lee 2010).

In this thesis, I will be examining the second edition of the Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) which took place in Cairo in 1960. The festival took place on three separate occasions in a different member country of the AAPSO: the first one was held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (1958), the second in Cairo (1960), and the third in Jakarta, Indonesia (1964). Although all three festivals remain under-researched, I chose the Cairo edition of the festival as my case-study. This is because during the Nasser regime era, Cairo played an important role within the African-Asian anti-colonial movement, especially as headquarter for the AAPSO (Abou-El-Fadl 2019). At the same time, Cairo was also the cultural cinema capital of the Arab world (Shafik 2005). An examination of the Cairo edition therefore allows for an examination of how Nasser's transnational anti-colonial African-Asian solidarity leadership efforts coalesced with his pan-Arab nationalist leadership aspirations and as manifested in the sphere of culture.

Writing this thesis sixty years after the occurrence of the festival posed serious challenges. The AAFF is not only a marginalized film festival, but also a forgotten one. When I initially envisioned this thesis, I wanted to include some interviews. Finding a living festival eyewitness was not an easy endeavor. This said, I did manage to recognize through my archival research one Egyptian actress that attended the festival and who is still alive. I was able to reach her through contacts in Cairo. She was very nice and approachable, and when I told her about the film festival, her memory seemed to fail her. She did not remember it, nor did she remember attending it. Additionally, the travel restrictions that were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic made my possible meeting with her even more difficult. I therefore decided to use archival research only to write this thesis.

The inaccessibility of archives in the Arab world, whatever their form, and researchers often having to construct their own archive, is an important component of the research process that I encountered while carrying out research for the thesis. Historian Omnia El Shakry, in her article "'History Without Documents:' The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East" (2015), writes about two important aspects that need to be taken into consideration when one is conducting archival research in the Arab World. The first is the material inaccessibility of archives and the second is the logic of archival imagination. She writes from the standpoint of the postcolonial reality of the region and the effects that colonization had and still has on archives and knowledge appropriation in particular. Intellectual traditions from the time of decolonization, she argues, have been "appropriated, remembered, or forgotten" (934).

My archival research expanded from Beirut to Cairo. I examined a wide range of material such as political magazines (*Ruz al-Yusuf*), cinema magazines (*al-Kawakib*), daily newspapers (*al-Ahram*, *The Times of India*), and biographies. My access to the Arabic language made the search easier considering that the majority of the documents examined were in Arabic. Moreover, I examined two of the films that were screened at the festival: the Egyptian film *The Nightingales' Prayer* (Barakat 1959) and the Indian film *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* (Panthulu 1959). I utilized discourse analysis and visual analysis to analyze the data. I discuss my methodology at great length in the second chapter. However, I would like to note here that as early as 1954, the Nasser regime had begun a policy of control over the media, and the press was nationalized by 1960 (Bier 2010: 170). Considering that my main source of data was the Egyptian press of 1960, a reflection on the archive itself and the institutions that created these archives is crucial. This acknowledgment is important because a nationalized press is the reflection of the state and therefore presents important biases for this study. While conducting my research, I tried to use this information to my methodological advantage instead of treating it as impartial data. More specifically, throughout my data analysis sections, the information I gathered was used to also reflect on the Nasser regime's strategies and reactions vis-à-vis the AAFF, while fully acknowledging its involvement in the press.

Despite Egypt's official pan-Arab ideology during the Nasser era, the first international film festival to happen in Cairo was an African-Asian film festival and not a pan-Arab one. Based on this fact which I uncovered in the process of my research, I start my first chapter by examining pan-Arabism during the Nasser era and in Egypt. I look at connections forged between pan-Arabism and culture, and the way culture was used to serve aspirations for Arab unity. I also examine Egyptian cinema and its leading position in Arab cinematic production more broadly, and how this was possibly owing to the limitations imposed by colonialism on culture in the Arab world (Shafik 2005). I support my research by theoretically grounding this thesis in postcolonial theory. Concerned with questions of colonial modernity and epistemology, postcolonial theory examines, among other things, cultural colonial hegemony and its representation. It was pioneered by Edward Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1979). Drawing on examples such as the song *al-Watan al-Akbar (The Greater Homeland)* ('Abd al-Wahhab 1960), I demonstrate how Nasser's regime was using culture to further the pan-

Arab nationalist cause. Additionally, drawing on recent literature that positions 1950s Cairo as an African-Asian anti-colonial hub, I demonstrate how pan-Arabism developed within a framework of anticolonial nationalism (Abou-El-Fadl 2015). I therefore argue that Cairo under the Nasser regime forged a space for pan-Arab and African-Asian manifestations of anti-colonial solidarity through unity. The Nasser regime was therefore strategically promoting Cairo as a capital for the Third World.

I then move to the second chapter, examining how the Cairo AAFF offered a space for pan-Arabism and Afro-Asianism to overlap. I revisit the history of film festivals, their statist propaganda origins, and the importance attributed to the hosting city of these festivals (Wong 2011; Stringer 2001). I then examine the media coverage of the AAFF and the multiple newspapers and magazines reports on it. Based on these reports, I demonstrate how Egyptian film stars, some of whom were involved in the Nasser regime's pan-Arab cultural efforts, like the late Lebanese actress and singer Jeanette Feghali, known by her stage name Sabah, were hired to promote the AAFF. My first data analysis demonstrates how the stars of the Cairo film industry promoted the AAFF and participated in festival events alongside other African and Asian film stars. Indeed, there was great anticipation around the AAFF, given that it was the first international film festival to ever take place in Cairo, as demonstrated by the press reports. My main thesis is that the AAFF offered a space for two ideologies to overlap. Pan-Arabism, and Nasser's strategic use of culture to promote it, was coupled with African-Asian anti-colonial solidarity, as manifested in different ways, within the framework of the first international film festival to happen in Cairo that I analyze in this thesis.

In chapter three, I move on to two films screened at the AAFF as case-studies: *The Nightingale's Prayer* (Barakat 1959) and *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* (Panthulu 1959). The films are different in their technique and genre, a black and white melodrama for the former and a technicolor biography of a national hero for the latter. However, they share similarities when it comes to the representation of gender and modernity. I demonstrate how gender was used in both films to further ideas of nationalism, particularly how national emancipation and women's emancipation were represented as overlapping. I place emphasis on providing the context to understand connections between cinematic works and wider historical and political processes at the time. The representation of gender in the films screened at the AAFF is telling of the vision of modernity that was advanced in newly independent postcolonial nation-states of the time. Using Laura Bier's (2010) study of state-sponsored feminist press of the Afro-Asian Federation for Women, I demonstrate how the Nasser regime was using gender to promote a progressive image of Cairo based on a Eurocentric understanding of modernity.[4] Additionally, I rely on the late feminist decolonial theorist Maria Lugones' (2007) work to explain the historical effects of global, Eurocentered capitalism on gender within the colonial/modern gender system.[5] Based on the films screened at the AAFF, I draw connections between representations of gender,

[4] What I mean by Eurocentric understanding of modernity is the historical narrative that places the cultural-geographical sphere of Europe at the center, creating a universal history of modernity that begins with Europe. Modernity instead should be understood in relation to colonialism and imperialism and through connectedness throughout history. See Gurminder K. Bhambra, 2007, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp.1-12.

[5] Decolonial theory is a theoretical body of work by Southern American thinkers based in the US academy. These include the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano who looks at the way in which global power continues to be structured by colonialism, especially through his concept of the "coloniality of power," see Aníbal Quijano, 2000, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology*, vol. 15, no. 2: 215-232.

nationalism and modernity, which reflected the limitations of the AAFF and the broader context within which this state-sponsored film festival was operating.

While conducting the research, I noticed an abundance of negative press reviews about the festival. In chapter four, I analyze the reasons behind these negative reviews. I first start by examining the initial promises of the AAFF as detailed in the festival announcement. I demonstrate how the festival was structured based on the European model of film festivals, namely the so-called “Big Three festivals” (Wong 2011: 5), or Cannes, Venice and Berlin. I demonstrate how these festivals are based on the idea of the spectacle (de Valck 2007). I then move on to the press reviews to examine the changes in attitudes in the media throughout the two weeks of the festival. I argue that the reviews did not engage with the content of the films screened in the AAFF. Instead, the critics’ concern was that the festival did not live up to a certain aspired-for-standard. The bad reviews are based on an underlying comparison between the Cairo AAFF and the Tashkent AAFF that took place two years prior to Cairo in 1958. The unique cultural contribution of the Cairo AAFF is therefore disregarded and marginalized from the press’s assessment of failure and success. Moreover, the meaning of success was also framed in terms of the Nasser regime’s aspirations for Cairo to become a capital for the Third World and a leading global cinema city. These aspirations together demonstrate how Nasserism, or the ideology associated with Gamal Abdel Nasser and late 1950s Egypt, attempted to position and advance Cairo through modernist values. An analysis of the discourse of the negative press reviews demonstrates clear aspirations for modernity and progress in 1960s Nasserist Cairo, and that the AAFF failed to achieve.

My final chapter moves away from the limitations and the negative reviews and examines the festival beyond the question of failure. Tracing the historical trajectory of cinema and culture in an era of anti-imperialist struggle reveals connections between the AAFF and Third Cinema that cannot be ignored. I argue that the AAFF prefigured the emergence of an anti-colonial, oppositional and resistant cinema. I look at connections that were forged between the festival and other organizations of the AAPSO. I pay particular attention to the involvement of Taha Husayn – the novelist who wrote *The Nightingale's Prayer* – in both the AAFF and the Afro-Asian Writers Association (AAWA). I also examine the connections between Sivaji Ganesan, the main actor of *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*, and Nasser (Ganesan 2007). Such connections are evidence of the bigger ties of solidarity that were being forged at the time. Additionally, I demonstrate how the festival advanced a discourse of resistance, mainly noticeable through the challenge to Hollywood's hegemony, or "Hollywoodcentrism" (Shohat and Stam 2014: 29). The main conclusion of the thesis is that despite the limitations imposed by a state-sponsored event, Egypt through Nasserism enabled a space for African-Asian cultural enactment of anticolonialism and Third World solidarity. These manifestations cannot be taken as singular moments in history but should be understood within a process that allowed for the emergence of Third Cinema and counter-cultural projects. The epistemological possibilities of the AAFF outweighed its failures. An understanding of its contribution in this way is I believe marginalized from historical accounts of both cinema and Third World solidarity and deserves further examination.

CHAPTER II

SITUATING THE AFRO-ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL: PAN-ARABISM, CINEMA AND AFRICAN-ASIAN TRANSNATIONAL AMBITIONS

The political stage offered by the post-WWII era gave way for certain African and Asian leaders to gain power and popularity. Prashad (2007) argues “the idea of the Third World moved millions and created heroes. Some of these were political figures like the three titans (Nasser, Nehru, Sukarno), but also Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Binh and Ho chi Minh, Algeria's Ben Bella, and South Africa's Nelson Mandela” (xvii). Nasser is one political figure that acquired status particularly after his nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, and despite waging a war on Egypt, “Great Britain and France failed, under international pressure, to regain control over the Suez Canal” (Lee 2010: 17). As a result, Nasser became a national, pan-Arab and Third Worldist hero. In what follows, I will examine Nasser’s pan-Arabism and the way in which his regime used culture to promote it. Using postcolonial theory, I argue that culture was historically used to advance Eurocentric representations and hierarchies of colonialism. I support this by turning to the history of Arab cinema in general, and Egyptian cinema in particular, during and after colonialism. My main take away is that anticolonial policies advanced by the Nasser regime allowed for an emergence of politically engaged cinema genres in Egypt that served as colonial critique. The newly emergent Egypt realist cinema engaged with themes such as national struggles. Indeed, Nasser’s pan-Arab policies were inherently anti-colonial. This allowed for larger solidarities to be forged. The Nasser regime demonstrated bigger aspirations for solidarity that surpassed pan-

Arabism and included the African and Asian continents more broadly, and through common anti-colonial aspirations for unity.

A. Culture in the Service of Nasserism

On July 26, 1952, the Free Officers organized a military coup that toppled the British colonial era monarchy. A clandestine network in the Egyptian military brought down King Faruq and formed the Command Council of the Revolution (CCR) that would transform Egypt from a monarchy and into a republic (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 227). One of the main figures of the Free Officers was Gamal Abdel Nasser, who became president of Egypt in 1953. Nasserism, the ideology associated with his person, can be understood in two ways. First, Nasserism can be understood as an ideology and practice that marked the rule of Nasser as of the 1952 coup and up until his death in 1970. Second, it can be understood in terms of the legacy and political tradition that surpassed Nasser's presidency and survives until today (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 225). What characterized Nasser's policies was his belief in the need for simultaneous political and social revolutions in Egypt. However, the coexistence of Egyptian and Arab nationalism in Nasserism is one of the most distinctive features. Key to Nasserism was a commitment to the Arab sphere based on a common history of colonialism and resistance (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 226). In short, both a preoccupation with social equality and a pan-Arab orientation were the early drivers of Nasser's presidency.

In an article entitled "Early Pan-Arabism in Egypt's July Revolution: the Free Officers' Political Formation and Policy-Making, 1946-54," the political scientist Reem Abou-el-Fadl (2015) argues that pan-Arabism was instrumental in the Free Officers coup that brought Nasser to power. This was due to the anticolonial nationalism of the

Free Officers' variant of pan-Arabism. Nasser's conception of pan-Arabism, she argues, was highlighted and understood through a common imperial past and a common cause of liberation in the Arab world (295). The driving force of this pan-Arab consciousness was the Palestinian War of 1948, which resulted in a strong common anti-imperialist and anti-colonial cause in the Arab world. Additionally, through the examination of Nasser's speeches, Abou-el-Fadl demonstrates how Nasser's early statements reveal that pan-Arab nationalism overlapped with Egyptian nationalism. This is highlighted through his conflation between the words "nation" and "homeland" which were both used by Nasser to refer to Egypt. She adds that "the crucial feature of Nasser's discourse was its application of similar standards and expectations to both the Egyptian and Arab spheres of identity, while context determined which was foregrounded at any particular time" (297). Pan-Arabism, Abou El-Fadl argues, was also shaped as an alternative to the West-aligned bloc within the League of Arab States (299). Championing the necessity of Arab unity led to the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) (1958- 1961), a union between Egypt and Syria. This short-lived union was effective when the Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) took place in Cairo. After its dissolution, Egypt maintained the name United Arab Republic until shortly after Nasser's death in 1970. Syrian secession, it has been argued, only increased Nasser's commitment to pan-Arab nationalism (Jankowski 2002: 183).

Pan-Arabism as an ideology was also propagated in the media. One such example is *Sawt al-'Arab* (*The Voice of the Arabs*), a radio station founded in 1953 by the Egyptian Arab Affairs Bureau – an intelligence apparatus set-up by Nasser. *The Voice of the Arabs* reached the whole region and was an important media outlet for liberation struggles. Consequently, the launching of the Algerian revolution on

November 1, 1954 was declared on *The Voice of the Arabs* (Abou-El-Fadl 2015: 298-299). Ethnomusicology scholar David Mcdonald, in his book *My Voice is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance* (2013), argues that pan-Arabism constituted a major part of the early Palestinian resistance soundscape. During the Nasser era, "the number and power of Egyptian radio stations expanded to the extent that transmitters placed along the borders could reach Arab audiences in neighboring countries" (71). Radio was therefore a tool used by Nasser to support anticolonial struggles, as well as to reach a larger Arab audience. One particularly important usage of radio was to propagate pan-Arabic music.

An example of pan-Arabic music from the 1960s is the song *al-Watan al-Akbar* (*The Greater Homeland*). This song was composed by Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab "at the behest of Nasser himself" (McDonald 2013: 73) to mark the setting of the foundation stone for the Aswan Dam in January 1960 (Gordon and Arafa 2014: 37). 'Abd al-Wahhab was a prominent Egyptian singer, actor and composer, known for his nationalist and pan-Arab compositions, perhaps the most recognized of these songs is *The Greater Homeland.* McDonald argues that 'Abd al-Wahhab "was perhaps the most effective and pronounced advocate for Nasser and the pan-Arab state" (2013: 72), adding that his work was foundational for the spread of pan-Arab nationalist sentiments. *The Greater Homeland* featured leading figures of the Arab music scene such as Egyptian singer and actor 'Abd al- Halim Hafiz, Egyptian singer and politician Faydah Kamil, Egyptian singers and actresses Shadyah and Najat, Algerian singer Wardah al-Jaza'iriyyah, and Lebanese singer and actress Sabah. The singers were from different Arab nationalities, constituting an ensemble that would represent the idea of a unified Arab nation. The song was accompanied by a televised performance aired on national television in 1960 and featured the brand-new Egyptian television orchestra (Abdelmoez 2020: 304).[6]

‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz – known as the voice of the revolution, or the “son of the revolution” (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 237) – leads with an opening verse summarizing the drive of the song: “my nation, the Arab people’s nation, you that called for greater unity, once you saw the beauty of revolution, you are great, and greater still, than all of existence, than eternity, oh my nation” (‘Abd al-Wahhab 1960). The song is indeed built around the theme of Arab unity. It calls for the fight and preservation of Arab nationalism, emphasizing the free Arab voice, a voice it claims is neither Western nor Eastern. Additionally, it denounces colonialism, tyranny and slavery. It calls for the end of Western hegemony and praises the Suez victory as a victory for all Arabs. As a symbolic anthem for pan-Arabism, this song is the greatest example of how culture was used by Nasser’s regime to further the dream of pan-Arab nationalism.

Many Egyptian singers and composers were indeed close to the Nasser regime. Alongside ‘Abd al-Wahhab, Egyptian singer and icon Um Kulthum identified with the Nasser regime. Half of her repertoire was composed of Egyptian nationalist-themed songs between 1952 and 1960 (McDonald 2013: 71-72). This was not the case in music alone, but also in cinema. Culture indeed played an important role in Egypt and was historically propagated to the rest of the Arab world through cinema. The history of

[6] The performance was visually expressive of the themes advanced by the music and lyrics. It begins with a collage of interlocked pointy Arab flags sliding away to the edges of the frame for a theater to appear. Introduced into the world of the stage, with hundreds of musicians and singers in place, the dramatic orchestral music is interrupted by drumrolls, reminiscent of those of the army. Indeed, an army-like march by men in suits begins, accompanied by women walking towards them in the opposite direction, holding flags of all Arab nations. The scene is orchestrated by ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s conductor baton as he waves it and controls the room. See *The Greater Homeland*, 1960, “El Watan El Akbar – Magmoet El Fananen,” *YouTube*, Date Accessed May 25 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m_15G4-ics.

Egyptian cinema is essential for an understanding of Egypt's leading role culturally, especially in 1960 when the AAFF took place, which I will now examine.

B. The History of Cinema in Egypt as Colonial Critique

In order to understand the history of Egyptian cinema, and its role in exporting culture to the rest of the Arab world, it is imperative to begin through a critical understanding of the concept of culture. Culture is at the core of questions pertaining to Eurocentrism, Orientalism, colonialist discourse and representation. Postcolonial theory, a field that can be broadly characterized as being interested in questions of power and knowledge in the representation of the colonized, can help us understand this further. Pioneered by Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* (1979), most postcolonial thought is centered on the cultural representation of the "other" and the effects this has on shaping the modern world. The postcolonial sociologist Gurminder Bhambra has argued that "questions of who this 'we' consists of, and whether 'we' must celebrate the successes (of some) despite the suffering (of others), formed the nub of postcolonial, and other, criticism" (2011: 658). Edward Said argues that this fundamental dichotomy between "us" and "them" is at the heart of Orientalism and is the result of European political hegemony and cultural domination over the so-called "Orient:" "Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment" (1979: 6). These inherent dominant modes of knowledge production have produced a discourse around the "other" based on unequal power relations on multiple levels: political, intellectual, cultural and moral.

Understanding this relationship between power and representation is central to this study because the AAFF is composed of images, sounds and cinematic narratives that can reinforce or resist dominant modes of understanding the "other." The dichotomy between "us" and "them" resulting from a historical power structure of domination is the essence of Eurocentrism. The term Eurocentrism was elaborated by Egyptian Marxist political economist Samir Amin (1989). Amin argues that Eurocentrism is a modern global political project that views the European political and economic model as a particular ideal to be followed, and a universal general law of progress more broadly. The construction of the myth of European superiority, Amin argues, is embedded in a historical teleology that shapes a mainstream understanding of modernity. This is one that sees a "progression from Ancient Greece to Rome to feudal Christian Europe to capitalist Europe—one of the most popular of received ideas" (106). Cinema can write the cultures of "others" and create stereotypical portrayals that in most cases can survive longer than reality, and some other times become incorporated by the "others" themselves.

Media scholars Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their powerful book *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (2014) demonstrate how media has been useful for the universalization of Eurocentrism. While they do not adopt the term postcolonial because of ambiguities of temporality and spatiality insinuated by this term,[7] they nonetheless use culture as the point of reference to demonstrate the relationship between popular culture and epistemological colonialism. They argue that Eurocentrism "normalizes" the practices and hierarchies of colonialism. When taking the example of cinema, Shohat and Stam

[7] Postcolonial theory has been critiqued for the underlying assumption of the word "postcolonialism". The latter suggests a movement beyond, signifying a teleological passage from a colonial "past" to a present where colonialism has become history. See Ella Shohat, 1992, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'," *Social Text*, no. 31-32: 99-113.

argue against the voyeuristic approach in Western films that typically depict the Third world. They claim that "in the manner of Western historiography, Eurocentric cinema narrates penetration into the Third World through the figure of the 'discoverer'" (2014: 145). The objectification of the subject of the film resulted in a dominant Eurocentric cinema that is "writing (in light) the cultures of 'others'" (2014: 145) in Said's sense of the term.

This backdrop is important to understanding the history of cinema in the Arab world and particularly in Egypt before and during the AAFF. During the colonial period, the cinematic situation in Egypt differed tremendously to other Arab countries especially those under French colonialism. For example, Syrian directors suffered great political and social restrictions, while Algeria and Morocco did not see any native productions until their national independence. Film scholar Viola Shafik in her book, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (2005), argues that cinema in the Maghreb countries was used by the French as a tool for propaganda, especially through the *cine-buses* or "trucks equipped with projectors and sent touring through the countryside, where in 1948 they reached around 465,000 spectators with some 250 screenings" (17). An average of two-hundred films were produced in the Maghreb up until 1954, and only six Arab actors were featured in them. This situation normalized orientalist films, telling stories from the colonies, about the colonized, but with French actors who speak in French. Indigenous culture was consequently either excluded from the screen or distorted.

The expansion of cinema in the Arab world was hindered by many factors, notably the relatively new art form – born in the late 19th century – and its control by colonial powers. Arab countries struggled for decades to create a national industry. The reasons why the Egyptian cinema industry developed earlier than in other Arab countries are numerous. Shafik (2005) cites some of them. First, musical theater art was well-established, making the shift towards cinema easier. Second, there were nationalist-orientalist entrepreneurs who invested in cinema and saw in it a good financial opportunity, contributing to its development. One example is Mohamed Talaat Pasha Harb, founder of Bank Misr, who established the cinema company Misr Studio (14). Third, there was resistance to foreign dominance in Egypt since 1922 and a consequent promotion of national culture adopted by the government. An increasing Egyptianization was implemented in many fields and was fixing a higher employment ratio for Egyptians (15). These reasons all together contributed to the earlier development of Egyptian cinema compared to other Arab countries.

Egypt's development of a financial model for its national cinema preceded other Arab countries which resulted in "its commercial production serv[ing] partly as a model for Lebanon, Syria and Iraq" (Shafik 2005: 2). Egypt therefore influenced the Arab world economically by creating a financial model to be emulated. The cultural influence was however more noticeable. Egyptian films broke the barrier of the Arab dialects and made the Egyptian dialect more accessible especially through song. Film stars were a crucial component of the Egyptian film industry. Often times being an Egyptian film star also entailed being a singer. This made the distribution of Egyptian films so wide in the Arab world, and Egyptian singers like Um Kulthum and composers like 'Abd al-Wahab famous in the whole region. Some singers from the rest of the Arab world went to Cairo where they became famous film stars and adopted the Egyptian dialect to succeed. Shafik (2005) cites Lebanon as having close relations with Egyptian cinema production and as exporter of some of its greatest stars (28), giving Sabah is an example. This said, the real shift that happened in Egyptian cinema was after the coup that brought the Free Officers to power in 1952.

It is important to examine how this cinema industry engaged with the national and regional political realities of the time. After 1952, a shift took place in Egypt towards cultural decolonization in the film industry. In an article titled “Egypt: Cinema and Revolution” (2017), Shohat examines the change in orientation and structure of Egyptian cinema after the 1952 revolution, especially the influence of Nasser’s policies and political orientation. Based on Nasser’s anticolonial ideology, new themes emerged and were being explored in moving images. While censorship existed, especially in terms of criticism of Nasser and Nasserist policies, historical and political films depicting the pre-revolution era were encouraged. Alongside the dominant Egyptian melodrama genre that featured singing and dancing, new genres were emerging. Cinema, as a reflection of Nasser’s policies, was increasingly challenging Eurocentrism. The political scene offered by the Nasser regime allowed for a newly emergent politically engaged cinema. After 1952, films belonging to the genre of realism, inspired by Italian neorealism, began to emerge.[8] The newly introduced realist films were politically engaged, speaking of national struggles, and oftentimes romanticizing the revolution. The pioneers of this genre were Youssef Chahine, Salah Abu-Seif, Tawfiq Saleh and Henri Barakat, among others (Shafik 2005: 134). A self-conscious cinema based on decolonization and de-westernization was possible during Nasser’s rule, as long as this cinema did not critique him or his leadership.

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[8] Italian neorealism is a movement in Italian Cinema from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s that “arose out of the trauma of fascism, war and occupation, in response to which it offered a means of national and personal self-examination.” It was mostly characterized by shooting outside the studio and engaging with the physical and social reality of Italian life post-WWII. See Mark Shiel, 2006, *Italian Neorealism Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (London: Wallflower Press), pp.26-28.

Nasser was to eventually apply a systematic policy of control over the media. This was manifested through the nationalization of the press and the nationalization of cinema in the early 1960s (Bier 2010: 170). However, Nasser's strong anticolonial policies allowed for a cultural decolonization in the film industry which resulted in new genres and in films that spread throughout the Arab world. Shohat and Stam argue that "cinema, as the world's storyteller *par excellence*, [is] ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nations and empires" (2014: 101). Culture, as manifested in cinema, was therefore a tool of the Nasser regime through which to reinforce pan-Arab nationalism. Since the main driver for Nasser's pan-Arabism was the fight against colonialism – as seen above mainly through Egyptian support for Palestine and Algeria – this eventually resulted in solidarities that surpassed the Arab world to encompass the Third World more generally. Policies of support for national liberation movements were being applied by the regime. I will now turn to examining such policies, again stressing on the use of culture, to demonstrate how they allowed for a Third World unity to be actively propagated in Egypt during the Nasser era.

C. African-Asian Aspirations for Solidarity and Unity

Abouel-Fadl (2015) argues that "the analytical separation of pan-Arabism from Egyptian nationalism, and from anticolonialism in turn, appears to be a distortion" (304). Egypt's support of liberation struggles can be seen in its policy of solidarity with African liberation movements. Egypt hosted African liberation movements through the African Association, founded in 1955, which mobilized African activists in Cairo "as a home from home for African students and political activists" (158). One study of Egypt's policy in East Africa is by the historian James R. Brennan (2010). Brennan demonstrates how radio was used by Cairo to advocate transnational solidarity, and emphasized the geographical importance of Cairo in terms of its cultural and political weight at the time. Egyptian radio did not solely aim to reach Arab listeners – as seen above through *Voice of the Arabs* – but to go beyond them. Brennan argues that shortwave broadcasts were used by Egypt in its foreign policy interests, and allowed transmission of pan-Arab nationalism to East Africa. The transmission of Egyptian propaganda happened through multiple languages. A Swahili-language broadcast, *Sauti ya Cairo* was launched on July 3, 1954, and broadcast Egyptian propaganda to East Africa in order to confront British colonial rule. *The Voice of Free Africa*, another Swahili "pseudo-clandestine station" (2010: 177), according to Brennan, was also launched to broadcast political programs and commentaries from Cairo.

Radio Cairo's broadcasts in Swahili popularized a new political language against Euro-American imperialism on the one hand, and "encapsulated the radicalism and paternalism of Egypt's African policy," on the other (2010: 177). Brennan argues that, while the broadcasts had minimal editorial influence from any Egyptian official, "Cairo's African radio announcers nonetheless borrowed liberally from Nasserite tradition of framing broadcasts around the identification of allies and enemies" (2010: 178). Radio broadcasts from Cairo encouraged anticolonialism and offered a vision of African-Asian solidarity against imperialism. These broadcasts assisted East African colonies in breaking free from European colonialism's chains (2010: 174). Radio Cairo therefore had a strong transnational influence in East Africa at a time of national struggles for liberation. Radio was arguably a very effective propaganda weapon used by the Nasser regime (2010: 176).

Nasser's African policies were only one facet of Egypt's regional and Third-Worldist aspirations of the time. Cairo played an important role in the history of Third World solidarity and constituted a space for African-Asian visions to be shaped. This was particularly possible through the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference in 1957 that was hosted by Cairo. The first Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) conference was held in Cairo University and was attended by representatives of forty-six African and Asian countries (Abou-El-Fadl 2019: 157). Inauguration addresses were given by Anwar El-Sadat and Youssef El-Sebai from Egypt, and by Rameshwari Nehru, head of the Indian delegation. Anwar El Sadat was a Senior Free Officer in charge of the preparatory committee of the conference – who also became the president of Egypt after Nasser's death in 1970. This was telling of the influence and supervision of the state of the overall conference (Abou-El-Fadl 2019: 173). As president of the conference, Sadat recalled in his opening address the Suez War. He expressed gratitude for the African and Asian support without which Egypt could not have been victorious. His choice of words emphasized the perceived victory of Egypt and its strength in defeating the enemy of the whole Third World. In his speech, he stated: "the hands of the aggressors trembled and their hearts sank while the spirit of Egypt on the firing line soared high […] it was not a victory for Egypt alone but victory on behalf of you all" (AAPSO 1958: 45-46). The Secretary General of the conference was Youssef El-Sebai, another military man who was also a novelist, editor and later Minister of Culture under Sadat (Abou-El-Fadl 2019: 173). El-Sebai emphasized that the Secretariat, in organizing the conference, had to live up to the standards set by Bandung. In his speech, he declared: "we set the resolutions of Bandung before our eyes and tried to build upon them. The next few days will show whether we have succeeded in our efforts" (AAPSO 1958: 53). Egyptian speakers were therefore clearly trying to represent Cairo as a second Bandung and a new African-Asian capital. Their representation of the state is telling of the Nasser regime's strong involvement in the AAPSO activities. The Permanent Secretariat of the AAPSO was established in Cairo following the conference and its headquarter remains there to this day.

In an article entitled "Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference," Abou El-Fadl (2019) argues that Egypt under Nasser built an African-Asian hub that has been overlooked in Middle East Studies. Middle East scholars have instead focused exclusively on Egypt in relation to Arab nationalism only. Building on historical geography theory that centers spatial analysis, her article details how an infrastructure of solidarity was constructed amidst these overlapping identities and different political projects of late 1950s Cairo. She argues that this infrastructure was built by Egyptians on Arab, African and African-Asian scales of translocal solidarity that led to an engagement with a "relational construction of identity" (161). Moreover, tensions and collaborations between the state and popular networks characterized the Cairo hub. Abou El-Fadl places Cairo at the center of anti-colonial post-WWII history for the role it played in advancing the struggles and causes of most notably Algeria and Palestine within the context of the African-Asian arena more broadly. It is important to note that this was not only created by the state; activists were also lead actors in moving within, and advancing, African-Asian networks, and navigated both nationalist and transnationalist spaces. Cairo was therefore not only a pan-Arab hub but a crucial site for African-Asian transnational connections.

The 1952 revolution created an important shift in Egypt both politically and culturally. New militant cinema genres emerged in line with the political orientation of the Nasser regime. With the growing nationalization of media and of cinema, the Nasser regime increasingly came to be invested in the cultural representation of pan-Arab nationalism. Within these related political and cultural shifts, Cairo witnessed its very first international film festival. Arab-oriented foreign policy and larger ties with liberation movements turned Cairo into a hub for transnational anti-colonialism. Within this context, the second edition of the AAFF took place in Cairo, in which culture was mobilized for African-Asian anti-colonial solidarity. In the next chapter, I examine how the AAFF was a space in which Nasser's pan-Arab and Afro-Asian ideologies were strategically intertwined.

CHAPTER III

OVERLAPPING IDEOLOGIES:
PAN-ARABISM AND AFRICAN-ASIANISM MEET IN THE AFRO-ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL

IN 1960, Cairo's cinema industry was the largest in the Arab world (Shafik 2005). Culture and media were beginning to be nationalized by the Nasser regime, resulting in a total nationalization of Egyptian press and cinema in 1961 (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 237). In the midst of such changes, the Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) was set to take place in Egypt, representing the first international film festival to be hosted in Cairo. In this chapter, I first begin with an examination of the political history of film festivals, demonstrating how they were inherently ideologically-driven. I argue that the AAFF borrowed from this national-oriented phase all while serving as a transnational resistance space. I then elaborate on my choice of magazine and newspaper articles used as data for this thesis. I use the data gathered to argue that Egyptian film stars were promoting the AAFF and actively participated in the festival events. This, I believe, demonstrates how pan-Arab cultural strategies of the Nasser regime were also being mobilized on an African-Asian scale. My main argument in this chapter is that the AAFF offered a space for pan-Arabism and Afro-Asianism to overlap.

A. Political History of Film Festivals

Film festivals in the early 1960s were still a new phenomenon and not as widespread as they are today. The film festival as an art form was born in 1932 when Benito Mussolini took advantage of cinema for his political agenda and created the Venice Film Festival. It was followed by Cannes, born as a national and artistic response to Venice in 1939 (Wong 2011: 565). The Cannes film festival website elaborates the sixth edition of the Venice Film Festival in 1939 that resulted in an ideological clash and the subsequent creation of the Cannes festival:

> "On the closing day, the jury huddled together to decide on the winners. An American film emerged as the unanimous favorite, but under pressure from Hitler, the Nazi propaganda film *Olympi*a by Leni Riefenstahl and the Italian film *Luciano Serra, Pilota* by Goffredo Alessandrini reaped the ultimate accolade, named the Mussolini Cup. The decision provoked outrage among the members representing democratic countries and France, the United States and Great Britain left the Mostra, vowing not to return" (Festival de Cannes 1939)."

Media scholar Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong in her book, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (2011), argues that, historically, film festivals were initiated as spaces for propaganda under cinematic and artistic guises. All major festivals established before or immediately after WWII served the interests of their respective national governments. The scope of those early European film festivals were therefore geopolitical, whether in support or in opposition to fascism. Wong divides the historical practices of film festivals into two temporal phases. The first one marked by the Venice-Cannes ideological conflict was clearly geopolitical. The second phase in the late 1940s saw festivals make a move "away from pure politics in a postwar Europe toward serious art" (40). The fundamental change however happened in the 1960s, a time marked by globalization and decolonization. Wong argues that film festival history was particularly marked by the 1968 student and workers movement in Paris that spilled over to the Cannes festival. French New Wave filmmakers such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard prevented the continuation of the festival while social unrest unfolded in the country.[9] The protests in Cannes 1968 made way for more open and noncompetitive sections in film festivals to emerge (2011: 46). The 1960s were therefore a decisive moment in European film festival history. This decade separated the first wave of geopolitically-driven film festivals and the second wave that saw the transformation of film festivals towards new shapes of globalization. The AAFF took place in Cairo at the intersection of these different waves of film festivals, serving as a transnational resistance space that borrowed from both temporal phases that Wong outlines.

What is important to note from Wong's arguments on the history of film festivals, is on the one hand, film festivals' drive to challenge Hollywood's domination of the film industry by introducing new and different films. On the other hand, of importance is also the relationship between the tourism industry and film festivals, as host cities draw people and fill hotels during off- peak tourist seasons (Wong 2011: 57). Wong's description of the motivations behind film festivals are particularly interesting to think of as they shape our understanding of 1960 Cairo as a host city. Julian Stringer's examination of the political economy of film festivals is similarly important for an understanding of the role played by the festival's host city. Stringer's article, "Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy" (2001), addresses the meaning of a film festival circuit and its underlying power relations. He argues that it is the contemporary city that plays a major role in determining the nature of film festivals.

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[9] French New Wave is a film genre that emerged in France in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Influenced by Italian post-WWII neorealism, the New Wave rethought the conventional film aesthetics, as well as the conventional budgets for films. It was pioneered by a generation of young filmmakers such as Louis Malle, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol, who in the majority started as critics for the French cinema magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*. New Wave filmmakers introduced unusual narrative tactics by shooting their films in real locations. Their amateurish-looking aesthetic was as a result of their small budgets, sometimes using their own production money to make films. See Richard Neupert, 2007, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), pp. xv-xxix.

This is in contrast to the national film industry which took primacy and influence in the nature of the film festival in the early years of festivals. According to Stringer, film festivals emergence in global cities are a marker of “modernity.” Therefore, geographical localities are a vital component of the film festival circuit as “the rise of film festivals on a global scale since the 1980s is implicated, too, in the restructuring of an alternative social object, namely the modern city” (136). Straddling “conceptual similarity and cultural difference” (2001: 139), film festivals’ cities need to maintain an image that places them in the competitive global economy and that gives them an advantage over other festivals. While Stringer’s article describes the festival city since the 1980s, it is nonetheless crucial for understanding the role that host cities play in film festivals more generally.

It could therefore be argued that the AAFF held on to some of the political-national objectives as the main drivers of the early film festivals. However, it could also be argued that the AAFF was used to advance Cairo as a transnational city. This is because, as demonstrated in the earlier chapter, Cairo was being advanced by the Nasser regime as an African-Asian hub and arguably a capital for the Third World. Film festival literature focuses in the majority on the history of European film festivals and therefore marginalizes contributions of early Third World film festivals. Based on newspapers, magazines and films as data, I revisit the history of the AAFF. In what follows, I will elaborate on the newspapers and magazines used for my data analysis, situating them contextually for a deeper understanding of their positions vis-à-vis the AAFF. I will also outline the films screened at the AAFF that I will use as case-studies, while justifying my choices.

B. Media Coverage of the Films of the Afro-Asian Film Festival as Data

My data analysis is based on three Egyptian sources, including Arabic newspapers and magazines, and one English Indian daily newspaper. The first source examined was Egyptian daily *al-Ahram*. I reviewed the newspaper during the festival period, which was February 29, and until March 11, 1960. In addition, I viewed the week preceding and superseding the festival for articles or retrospectives on the festival. In *al-Ahram*, there were announcements for the festival opening and closing ceremonies. I found a total of three articles that featured the festival, whether event coverage or editorials, from the entire period examined. Additionally, there was a mention of the festival program for every day of screening in a section that features the daily shows in cinemas, theaters and casinos across Egypt. The AAFF was hosted at the Rivoli cinema. The Rivoli is a formerly British-owned movie theater that was seized by Egyptians post-1952. During the 1952 revolution, the Rivoli was set on fire alongside other foreign-owned establishments in downtown Cairo (Naaman 2011: 39). Following the fire, the brothers Mustapha and Muhamad Gaafar seized ownership of the movie theater. The Gaafar brothers became the owners of the most luxurious cultural premises in Cairo: the Rivoli, the Opera and the Radio (Reynolds 2012: 193). The Rivoli as host of the AAFF therefore had a lot of significance, whether as a witness to the revolution, or as a symbol of rejection of foreign rule.

This initial newspaper search revealed that the films screened included both short and feature films, and belonged to different countries of origin. *al-Ahram* did not provide a comprehensive list, but the program of the day listed films from China, Japan, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Indonesia, Kuwait, Morocco and the United Arab Republic. I was therefore able to gather the names of the films screened as published on a daily basis in the newspaper. However, the titles were written in the Arabic language. This posed a challenge because the names of the films were often translated from their original language. For films produced nearly sixty years ago, their original titles were hard to trace. Additionally, the absence of the name of the director made the confirmation of the film title difficult. This said, I was able to identify one Egyptian film, *The Nightingale's Prayer* (Barakat 1959). The title of the film was written in its original language in Arabic and therefore possible to confirm. The film was also featured on the announcement of the closing ceremony of the festival (N/A 1960b). *The Nightingale's Prayer* is directed by Henri Barakat, one of the most inventive Egyptian directors of the melodrama and musical genres (Shafik 2007: 57). He is one of the directors who took up the topics of nationalism, socialism and women's issues in his films during the Nasserist period and was part of the turn to politically engaged cinema (Shafik 2007: 122). *The Nightingale's Prayer* is a literary adaptation of a novel by Taha Husayn and belongs to the genre of realist cinema. According to Shafik, "in Egypt, and in Syria, realist cinema during the 1950s and 1960s created a boom in literary adaptations. Some outstanding works by realist Arab authors such as Ghassan Kanafani, Hanna Mina, Naguib Mahfouz, and Yusuf Idris were transferred to the screen" (Shafik 2005: 122).

The search to reconstruct the screening program was initially possible through *al-Ahram*. Moreover, an online search revealed that the film *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* was screened in the AAFF and that the actor Sivaji Ganesan won the award for best actor. To confirm this information, I turned to Ganesan's autobiography (2007) and to the Egyptian cinema magazine *al-Kawakib. Al-Kawakib,* published by Dar al-Hilal publishing house in Cairo, first appeared in 1932, and is still in print today.

In the 1960s, it was well known as the Egyptian cinema periodical that featured interviews with film stars, articles about cinema creators and news from film sets. Best described as a mass art scene magazine, the cover of this magazine was famous for featuring faces of female film stars posing for the audience. Published weekly, *al-Kawakib* had insights into the stars' interaction with the AAFF and the film industry's reception of the festival. Indeed, the magazine published a special edition on the occasion of the AAFF, under the pretext of the first international film festival to take place in Cairo. For *al-Kawakib*, I examined in total three issues 447, 448 and 449 published respectively on February 23, March 3, and March 10, 1960. This was by far the richest source I reviewed as it included a multitude of features such as articles, interviews, announcements, and advertisements. In one of the issues examined, an article mentioned that thirty-six countries were participating in the festival (N/A 1960h). Another article discussed the film industries of some of the countries whose films were featured in the festival, including Pakistan, Indonesia, Japan, China, Russia and of course India (N/A 1960g).

India's submission to the AAFF, *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* (1959), is a Tamil-language film produced and directed by B. R. Panthulu. Panthulu was an Indian producer, actor and director. *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* is a biographical picture and a musical that alternates singing and dancing with war and battles. It is the real story of Veerapandiya Kattaboman's eighteenth century resistance to British colonialism. Kottaboman, in Tamil popular memory is considered a hero of resistance (Krishnan 2008: 147). With no additional sources that could confirm more films, my analysis rests upon the two above-mentioned Egyptian and Indian films. While it does not encompass all films featured in the festival, it is a provisional analysis of the nature of the films screened, and it is representative of the submissions of two well-developed cinema industries at the time: Egypt and India.

Another important magazine I examined from the 1960s was *Ruz al-Yusuf.* First published in 1925, *Ruz al-Yusuf* began as a cultural magazine and then expanded to include politics during the first years of its publication. The magazine took the name of its founder Ruz al-Yusuf, a pioneering Arab journalist. In 1960, *Ruz al-Yusuf* was nationalized but maintained its progressive and pioneering status. It was famous for the art of caricature it advanced in the Arab world. It was also known for its controversial stands and for breaking taboos. Still in publication until this day, the state-owned magazine has changed features entirely with its increasing pro-regime reporting in recent years. In the 1960 editions of the weekly, I examined op-eds in which authors expressed opinions about the AAFF. The issues examined were three, 1655, 1656 and 1657 all published in March 1960. In addition to these Egyptian sources, I also examined reporting from the AAFF for *The Times of India* – accessed through online resources. *The Times of India* is a daily newspaper reporting in the English language. The value that *The Times of India* brought to this thesis, was the reporting on the festival from Cairo. There were two articles that reported on the festival during its occurrence, one on March 3, 1960 and another on March 4, 1960.

The extensive search for these sources was a major component of the thesis. While a full reconstruction of the program was not possible, I was still able to identify films screened at the AAFF. Additionally, the announcements, articles and op-eds found in these sources were not only informational but also evidential basis for critical engagement with the festival. The participation of Egyptian stars of the film industry was featured at great length, and in all the Egyptian media examined. Such vast participation is what I will examine in this next section to identify overlaps between pan-Arab use of culture and the presence of the same cultural icons in the AAFF.

C. Arab Film Stars in the Service of the Afro-Asian Film Festival

Film festivals were nearly three decades old in the early 1960s. Additionally, the AAFF was the first international film festival to be held in Cairo (N/A 1960e: 1). This resulted in a great anticipation around the AAFF. *al-Kawakib* featured diaries of artists recounting their experiences at other international film festivals, that ran in anticipation of the AAFF and the arrival of an international film festival to Cairo. One example is the diary of Egyptian actress Fatin Hamamah through which she recounted her experience attending the Cannes film festival in 1952. Her presence at Cannes was due to Youssef Chahine's film *Son of the Nile*, in which she starred, and that was participating in the festival. The diary was titled "Min Yawmiyat Fatin fi Mahrajan Kan" (From Fatin's Diary in Cannes) and presented an image of what goes on in international festivals" (Hamamah 1960: 13). This shows the strong anticipation around the AAFF that the press was furthering. Another promotion of the AAFF in *al-Kawakib* featured Lebanese actress and singer Sabah (Illustration 2). As previously noted, Sabah was active in the Egyptian cultural scene and was one of the singers in *The Greater Homeland* song. She appeared on an advertisement promoting the AAFF, offering readers a book on Arab cinema history for this occasion. She was portrayed in colorful glamorous attire, typically associated with her, and a book in hand. The warm interior of the advertisement creates a welcoming, cozy atmosphere that encourages the reader to seek the book. Dressed in red, Sabah becomes the symbol of an intellectual and sophisticated Arab cinema history, as well as a clearly politically engaged one.

The caption above Sabah read: "*al-Kawakib* takes the opportunity of the convening of the second AAFF in Cairo to present this special issue, and presents as a gift to its readers a book that narrates the history of Arab cinema" (N/A 1960j: 3). To continue with *al-Kawakib*'s preparation for the AAFF, one article titled "al-Mahrajanat Multaqa al-Afkar" (Festivals as Forums for Ideas) written by Ahmad Badirkhan (Badirkhan 1960) states:

> "Here we are w itnessing the establishment of an international film festival in Cairo for the first time which is the Afro-Asian Film Festival. The aim is to improve political ties between the countries of the Bandung conference, give the countries participating in the festival an idea about our country and its development, and create opportunities for international film production partnerships between us and the rest of the African and Asian countries. It is a good opportunity for cultural exchange" (4).

What is interesting in this excerpt is the author's focus on the political and financial advantages offered by the AAFF to "Bandung countries." Moreover, the emphasis on "development" underscores the organizers' goal of presenting Cairo as a modern and "developed" city – in other words, a capital for Africa and Asia. This is noticeable in the engagement of Egyptian officials in the organization of the festival. The AAFF ran under the wing of the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. one article in al-Kawakib written by ʻAbd al-Munʻim al-Sawi (1960), "Limadha Nuqim al-Mahrajan? (Why Are We Having the Festival?) describes the festival as "an expression of the UAR's policy that shifted since the Bandung resolutions […] towards operating within an African-Asian political frame" (4).

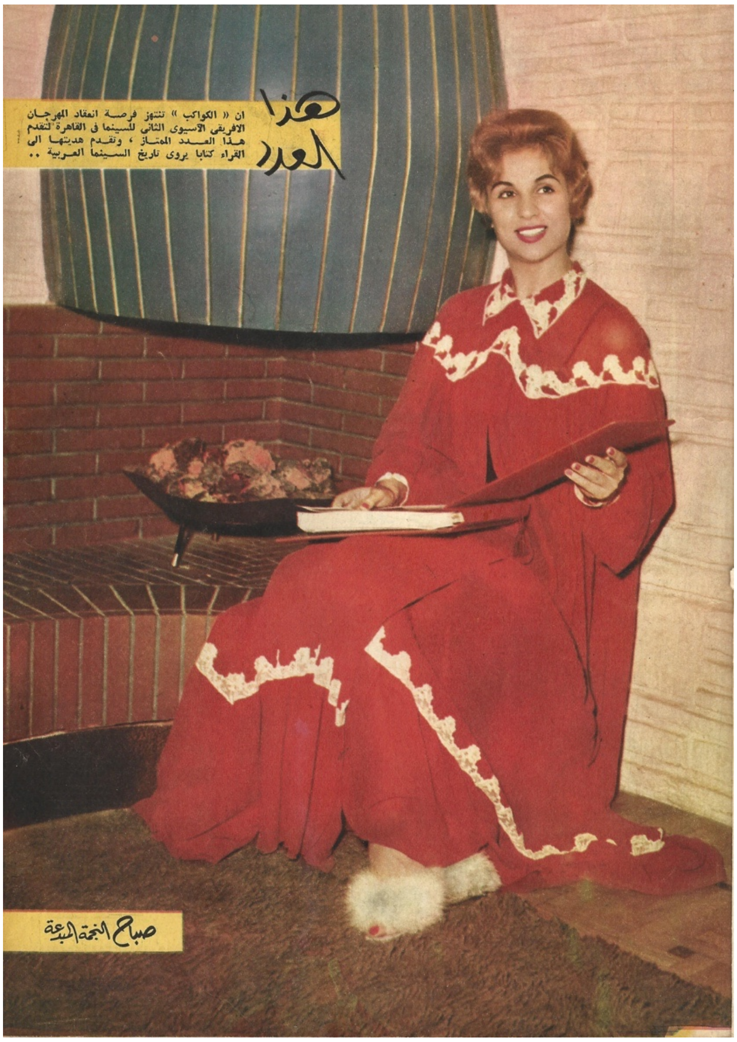

Illustration 2 – Lebanese singer and actress Sabah promoting a book on Arab cinema for the occasion of the Afro-Asian Film Festival, featured in N/A, 1960, “Sabah al-Najmah al-Mubdi‘ah (Sabah the Brilliant Star),” al-Kawakib, March 1, p.3.

Illustration 3 – Film stars from Africa and Asia on stage at the opening ceremony of the second Afro-Asian Film Festival in Cairo, featured in N/A, 1960, “Nujum Asya wa Afriqya fi Sama’ al-Qahirah (African and Asian Stars in the Sky of Cairo),” *al-Kawakib* Magazine, March 8, pp. 6-7.

The AAFF was inaugurated in the presence of Tharwat ʻAkashat, Minister of Culture and National Guidance. ʻAkashat was a central figure in advancing Nasserist "cultural policies aimed at producing educated, "model citizens" with socialist values" (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 237). He founded the Arts Academy, which was consequently turned into the High Institute for Music and the Ballet Institute among other cultural establishments (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 237). ʻAkashat inaugurated the festival by expressing his gratitude for the "unanimous recommendation" to have the second edition of the AAFF in Cairo during the first edition of the AAFF in Tashkent two years earlier (N/A 1960i). Opening addresses were given by the Director of the Organizing Committee of the Festival, Film Director Muhammad Karim, Soviet Minister of Culture, and the leader of the Lebanese delegation (N/A 1960i: 6). In addition, African and Asian ambassadors and diplomats were present at the inauguration ceremony. However, the preoccupation of the press was with the numerous film stars from Africa and Asia standing together on the stage of the Rivoli. Egyptian actor ʻUmar al-Sharif stood in front of the microphone and announced the names of the participating film stars. He called the names of actors and actresses from China, India, Indonesia, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam respectively, and finally his fellow actors and actresses from the UAR (N/A 1960i: 7). In the article "Nujum Asya wa Afriqya fi Samaʾ al-Qahirah" (African and Asian Film Stars in the Sky of Cairo) (N/A 1960i), all actors and actresses can be seen standing on stage next to each other, the women holding bouquets of flowers (Illustration 3). The staging and the static nature of the event as seen in this picture foreground the controlling theatrics that the ministry of culture imposed on the festival, and its state-sponsorship. *The Times of India* coverage, "Afro-Asian Film Festival: Inauguration in Cairo," reported: "The second Afro-Asian Film Festival opened in the star-studded hall of a local cinema here yesterday" (1960l: 5). Additionally, an op-ed in *Ruz al-Yusuf* titled "Liqaʾ Asya wa Afriya" (The Meeting of Asia and Africa) stated: "actors stood on a stage on which the map of the two great continents was drawn in purple and yellow roses" (al-Sabur 1960: 33).

The opening ceremony was followed by a dinner at the Semiramis hotel on the Nile. Egyptian film stars were also present at the dinner. The daily *al-Ahram* featured an article with accompanying photographs of the gathering held on the Nile (Illustration 4). The coverage titled "Nujum ʻala Nil Samiramis" (Stars on the Samiramis Nile) reads: "smiles on all faces are understood by the unity of the East that brought its nations' cinematic art scene together for the first time under the Cairo sky" (N/A 1960d: 10). The images clearly portray how the AAFF offered a space for human encounters to take place by bringing African and Asian stars together. Artists from Egypt were posing with other artists from Africa and Asia and were in some instances signing photographs (N/A 1960d). Furthermore, visiting film stars from Africa and Asia were taken on tours around Cairo (Illustration 5). These trips are documented in *al-Kawakib* in the article "Duyuf al-Mahrajan fi Ziyarat al-Haram" (Festival Guests Visit the Pyramid) (NA 1960f). The article starts with the following sentence:

> "A program was organized for the delegations participating in the Afro-Asian Film Festival to visit the landmarks of Cairo, monuments and museums in its suburbs, and places that give a correct idea of the renaissance of the southern region of the United Arab Republic" (1960f).

To describe the effects that film festivals have on the host city, Wong writes: "film festivals formed a welcome addition to the tourist industries, especially when situated in times of low use and when utilizing existing facilities (hotels, cinemas)"

(2011: 39). This article on the trips of the visitors demonstrates Wong's description of film festivals as touristic sites as well as artistic ones. Moreover, the tour was organized in a way so as to present Cairo as a modern city by giving the "correct idea" of its development.

The AAFF turned Cairo into a host city for the meeting of cinema and anticolonial resistance. Shifting the boundaries between pan-Arab nationalism and African-Asian transnationalism, the AAFF served as a site for cultural negotiation of solidarity. In 1960 and through the AAFF, pan-Arabism and African-Asian solidarity were not two separate ideological orientations but overlapping ones. Egyptian film stars and the press both embraced the AAFF as it allowed Cairo to become the desired modern city and capital of the Third World. What kind of modernity was the AAFF promoting through some of the films screened at the festival? And how was Cairo represented as a progressive city through cinema? I will answer these questions by examining the representation of gender, nationalism and modernity within the films screened at the AAFF in the following chapter.

Illustration 4 – Film stars from Africa and Asia gathered at the hotel Semiramis on the Nile, featured in N/A, 1960, "Nujum 'ala Nil Semiramis (Stars in the Semiramis Nile)," *al-Ahram*, March 2, p.10.

Illustration 5 – Film stars and guests of the second Afro-Asian Film festival on a tour in Cairo, featured in N/A, 1960, “Duyuf al-Mahrajan fi Ziyarat al-Haram (Festival Guests Visit the Pyramid), *al-Kawakib*, March 8.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONALISM REDEFNIED:
GENDER AND MODERNITY ON AND OFF SCREEN

The Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) as demonstrated above, was a space in which Nasserism's pan-Arab and African-Asian solidarities overlapped. National cinematic contributions submitted to the AAFF were both reflections of the reimagined newly-independent nation-states on the one hand, and the larger reimagination of the postcolonial Third World on the other hand. Two films screened at the AAFF are used as case-studies in this chapter: *The Nightingale's Prayer* and *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*.[10] Central themes to both these films are gender and modernity and their relationship to nationalism. In what follows, I argue that national liberation and women liberation are represented as homogenous in these films. Drawing connections between these cinematic works and the Nasser-era Egyptian feminist press, I argue that the Nasser regime was trying to advance a vision of modernity through gender that would promote Cairo as a progressive city. Additionally, Cairo as a progressive city through the Nasser regime's vision cannot be separated from the person of Nasser, as a male leader. Such representations of gender and nationalism, as manifested through modernity, reflect discourses advanced in newly established postcolonial nation-states through state-sponsored film festivals.

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[10] See, Henri Barakat (dir), 1959, "*Du'a' al-Karawan (The Nightingales' Prayer),*" *YouTube*, Accessed January 4, 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1mldRdh1X0&t=600s, and B. R. Panthulu (dir), 1959, *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*, YouTube, Accessed January 4, 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nK9sTjHXGE&t=3881s.

Illustration 6 – Second Afro-Asian Film Festival closing ceremony announcement, featuring the Egyptian film *The Nightingale's Prayer*, and an illustration of the Golden Eagle award, featured in N/A, 1960, "al-Hafalat al-Khitamiyyah (The Closing Ceremonies)," *al-Ahram*, March 11, p.7.

A. Gender and National Liberation on Screen

Henri Barakat's *The Nightingale's Prayer* is a story of revenge, rape, male domination and of female resistance. The film casts Fatin Hamamah and Ahmad Mazhar, two film stars of the Egyptian cinema industry. Fatin Hamamah plays the role of a village girl, Amna, who is forced to escape to the city with her mother and sister after losing her father. To make ends meet, Amna and her sister are sent to work as domestic servants. Amna serves a bourgeois family that treats her nicely and offers her the space to learn. By spending time with the family's daughter, she is introduced to the world of music and of literature, things she was unfamiliar with in her previous village life. Amna's sister on the other hand, is sent to work in the home of an unmarried wealthy architect. One day she returns home devastated, only to reveal to her family that her employer had raped her. Once the news reaches Amna's uncle, the uncle cold-heartedly kills Amna's sister, accusing her of bringing shame upon the family. Amna escapes her family and goes to work for the architect with the intention of avenging her sister's death. She plans to seduce him in order to make him suffer. In the end, however, in addition to seducing him, she falls in love with him too. Amna's whereabouts are discovered, and her uncle attempts to kill her but kills the architect instead. A drama *par excellence*, *The Nightingale's Prayer* is a great example of realist cinema adapted from literature in the Nasserist period that addressed feminist concerns (Shafik 2007). The literary genre was used at the time as a social critique. Themes such as class and gender struggle were common to realist literature, which the cinema industry borrowed from.[11]

[11] As Shafik continues to argue "the new literary genre became the critic of social abuses and of bourgeois morals and snobbery, although it never completely liberated itself from either. Some similarities can be observed in Egyptian melodrama. During the 1940s and 1950s the theme of the noble woman either seduced or failed became increasingly popular. As a list set up by Galal al Charkawi shows, in the twenty-three films screened in the season of 1945/46 alone, nine girls were seduced and two raped." The relationship between cinema and literature was evidently strong. Shafik argues that this was

The film is shot on location – as opposed to studio shooting – and adopts a black and white gloomy atmosphere. The use of shadows in this film serves to further the dark story the director attempts to convey through the cinematography.

In stark contrast to the black and white sinister visuals, *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*'s colorful images bring closer to the present day a true story from the eighteenth century. Directed by B. R. Panthulu, *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* is a story of a Tamil chieftain in South India who refuses to bow to the sovereignty of the British colonialists. The lead role is played by Indian film star Sivaji Ganesan. Kattaboman is the last leader standing who is yet to acknowledge the sovereignty of the British, while all other feudal chieftains have done so in exchange for monetary rewards. For this reason, the British try to create unrest in his territory and for the purpose of bringing it under their control. Following a killing ordered by one of Kattaboman's ministers without his knowledge, the British find an excuse to attack his fiefdom. The British announce a war and Kattaboman's land is attacked. When defeat becomes certain, Kattaboman is smuggled out to a nearby village by some of his men. Eventually, the British find him with the help of local rulers and order his execution through hanging. He is led in front of a large crowd of his people bowing to him in respect while he walks towards the rope where he is to be hung. The film also tells a parallel love story between Vellaiyammal, a village girl, and Vellaiyathevan, Kattaboman's commander-in-chief. When Vellaiyathevan manages to tame Vellaiyammal's bull, Vellaiyammal agrees to marry him and they fall in passionate love. However, when the war by the British is announced, she begs him not to go and join as she has had dreams of death.

due to the directors' background, as most realist directors came from the bourgeoisie. See Viola Shafik, 2005, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press), pp. 123-134.

He disregards her pleas and goes to war only to be killed. She avenges his death by taking the life of the soldier who killed him. She then dies from cardiac arrest next to her husband's dead body.

Death occupies a very important role in *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*. One very important and symbolic death is that of Kattaboman's daughter, Meena. Meena begins to get physically weak while her father and his soldiers begin to lose the battle against the British. She is taken by her mother to the battlefield because of her deteriorating condition. There she tells her father: "You've lost. Let us all die together!" She then closes her eyes and dies in his arms. Meena is the only female character that expresses political thoughts and ideas, and yet she is only twelve years old. In one scene, she is portrayed as more intelligent than her mother, explaining to her that thieves steal only because they are hungry. She is an empathetic character who asks her father to be understanding and not to punish the poor. Meena's death is very symbolic as it portrays the death of the resistance movement and coincides with the defeat of Kattaboman. It is equally symbolic, however, because it is one of the rare voices of female resistance in the film. While it is interesting that a woman occupies such a symbolic and significant role in the film, it seems that this role is only possible because Meena is a child. Engaged political observations are portrayed through this child character throughout the film, while the adult women are confined to the home and to the care of their hero warriors. In any case, even this limited role is cut short by her sudden death, and she is forever trapped in childhood. The narrative's inevitable punishment of the young child's female political agency and initiative underscores the patriarchal discourse that the film is ultimately reproducing.

The connection between women and national liberation is remarkable in the film. On one hand, Meena is an embodied representation of struggle against foreign rule and represents the voice of resistance. Vellaiyammal, on the other hand, is another woman whose role is symbolically tied to the fight for liberation. Her representation of resistance is expressed through actions instead of words. She single-handedly takes down the soldier who killed her lover in battle. After having accomplished her duty as an agent for the liberation struggle, she dies next to the body of her murdered lover. Women are therefore agents only insofar as the national liberation struggle is concerned. Moreover, revenge is a recurrent theme in both films, whether to avenge a lover killed in battle, or the death of a murdered sister. While they are both acts of love, they are also politically driven vengeful acts. They offer a new representation of women that is significantly tied to liberation.

Such connections were heavily present in Egyptian cinema of the time. Gender boundaries were defined by service to the national struggle and female liberation was portrayed as the synonym to nationalist liberation (Shafik 2007: 122). Films labeled as "feminist" at the time where those that presented female liberation as necessary for national independence and economic progress. Such definitions of feminism through Egyptian cinematic representations emphasized independence, professionalization and female labor (Shafik 2007: 122). Henri Barakat was known to address such themes in the films that he directed. One example is *The Open Door*, directed by him in 1963, in which the female protagonist is a well-educated woman who rejects marriage and social constraints, and chooses to defend her country in Suez instead (Shafik 2007: 129). *The Open Door* demonstrates how Henri Barakat reproduces women liberation as intrinsically tied to national liberation in his films more generally.

Gender and nationalism are clearly represented as inseparable in *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*. Some female characters such as Meena and Vellaiyammal are represented as agents of the liberation struggle. They embody national liberation and their roles – and lives – reach an end once defeat is certain. Similar associations were also dominant in Egyptian cinema during the Nasser era. The question that this begs is how does this portrayal of gender through the AAFF bode in terms of the place of feminism within different bodies of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO)? And what does it predict in terms of the modern pan-Arab vision that Egypt was trying to achieve?

B. Seeking Eurocentered Modernity

In Prashad's aforementioned book, his chapters bear the names of different cities that played a major role in advancing the Third World project. In the chapter under the title "Cairo," he gives an overview of the vital role the city played as a host for African-Asian organizations and under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser "by being the secretariat of numerous Afro-Asian and non-aligned institutions" (2007: 52). Prashad argues that the 1957 Cairo conference that launched the AAPSO was very important for Third-World feminists as it created the Afro-Asian Federation for Women that would subsequently organize the Afro-Asian Women's Conferences. He focuses on Egyptian author and professor of literature Aisha 'Abdul-Rahman as a remarkable figure in the AAPSO conference of 1957, while briefly revisiting the history of feminism in Egypt. 'Abdul-Rahman, he argues, gave one of the main speeches of the conference highlighting the role of women's liberation through anticolonial nationalism (2007: 53). The association between gender, national liberation and modernization was central in the discourse on feminism not only within cinema but within African-Asian feminist organizations (Prashad 2007: 53).

The historian Laura Bier, in her article "Feminism, Solidarity and Identity in the Age of Bandung" (2010), explores state-sponsored feminism as expressed in the Nasser-era Egyptian press. She traces the various changes it undertook during Nasser's attempt to position Egypt as a hub of African-Asian anti-colonial solidarity. Bier argues that the Afro-Asian Women's Conferences allowed a solidarity based on a common history of subjugation to Western imperialism (152). This is what Western feminism at the time was unable to attain as it ignored the question of nationalism, seen as opposing universal feminism (2010: 149). However, Bier adds that the situation in Egypt was not as emancipatory as it may have seemed. The nationalization of the press meant that there were fewer women's periodicals. In 1958, the only remaining periodical from the women's press was *Hawwa'* (153). *Hawwa'* was publishing at the time intimate interviews with foreign women. This was in consistency with the social realism trend in the arts and literature. The purpose of such articles was to give a real, eye-witness account of other women's lives (154). Such articles, however, were written by women from the same social class and same generation: "they were, in many cases, the first to benefit from the successes of the early Egyptian feminist movement in opening higher education and the professions to women" (156). Juggling between "other women" and themselves, Bier argues, Egyptian women were advocating transnational affiliations, but also searching for a place for the modern Egyptian woman. Bier therefore suggests that there were cultural challenges in prevailing views transmitted through Eurocentric discourses and that were upheld by some of the Egyptian feminists of the time in relation to their African and Asian counterparts. Bier concludes that "in sum, these women writers of the Egyptian press surreptitiously embraced identifiable criteria of Western modernity, despite their surface rejection of such influence" (158). This resulted in a comparison of the conditions of women and a reproduction of the imperial gaze on African and Asian woman as "inferior" to the Egyptian.

The adoption of Eurocentric discourses in feminist or cultural projects of the AAPSO, such as the AAFF, is worth examining further. In her study of post-1952 Egyptian cinema, Shohat (2017) explains: "the urban bourgeoisie was selectively adopting Western values; the cinema became a venue for such desires" (228). It was therefore common at the time to see films portraying the desire to become "modern" as necessarily emancipatory. *The Nightingale's Prayer*, for example, represents a clear opposition between the traditional and the modern. The need to break from old traditional ideals is enacted through denouncing the murder of women. The criticism of femicide by the film is very important and is portrayed in Amna's character that seeks to avenge her sister's murder.[12] However, the film is representing all that is traditional as necessarily bad and all that is modern as good and progressive in a well-defined binary.

Breaking from the traditional is portrayed by traveling from the village to the city. The film starts with Amna, her mother and sister being forced to leave their home in the village following the death of the father. The introduction of the film represents the village as a cruel and unmerciful place. These traits of the village are represented in the persona of the uncle. The uncle embodies the village and its backwardness, the traditional and the primitive. The city, even though holds dark secrets as well, on the

[12] Femicide is defined as sexist-based crimes committed against women. The term was first elaborated by feminist author Diana E. H. Russell. See Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell, 1992, *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing*, New York: Twayne Publishers.

other hand, is the place for emancipation. Amna's rejection of ignorance is typical of the progressive image of the woman that Egyptian cinema was advocating. Amna is first portrayed as a naive village girl. However, what gives her the courage to defy the architect and plot her revenge against him is her education. She had acquired this education from the middle-class family she served when she first arrived in the city. The educated family was her safety, their house a space of education and progress, in stark contrast to her own background. It is through education that she is able to resist the architect.

Moreover, the people in the city are portrayed as different. Zanubi is an example of a character encountered in the city. She is the "liberated" woman that Amna seeks when she finds herself alone. Zanubi is a single woman who lives on her own and is well connected. She is the person Amna asks for help and she is the one to guide Amna on how to seduce a man and how to make men fall in love. There are other denominators of the city as an emancipatory space in the film. One of them is the fact that the architect drinks alcohol. Not only does he drink alcohol, but he also justifies his sexual desires to Amna through his alcohol consumption. Shafik (2005) elaborates on the taboos that Arab states, whether capitalist or socialist, did not tolerate in cinema. She argues that "subjected to particular criticism were erotic love and the consumption of alcohol" (49). She adds that alcohol constituted a breach for morality for certain religious communities. The fact that alcohol was used in the film, and by the male protagonist, is telling of the image of the "liberated" Egypt that cinema in the late 1950s attempted to portray. Egyptian filmmakers seized opportunities to break with long-standing taboos following the 1952 revolution, and the Nasser regime encouraged it (Abou-El-Fadl 2020: 238).

The adoption of Eurocentric tropes through the arts as promoted by the AAFF, even if for anti-colonial and emancipatory purposes, was therefore an important component of the discourses circulating and in use at the time. Egyptian cinema embodied these discourses just as they were reproduced by Egyptian transnational African-Asian anti-colonial feminism. However, they were seemingly adopted in the service of a modern project in line with the Nasser regime's vision for Cairo as the progressive capital of the African-Asian world. Central to Egypt's shift from a monarchy to a republic adopting Arab socialism, was the reordering and mobilization of gender and class relations. Egypt's scale of modernization was therefore measured against the status of women (Bier 2010: 146). Advances to women in Egypt during the Nasser era were promoted under the guise of state feminism (Prashad 2007: 60). Modernization and the re-ordering of the gender order went hand in hand, both mobilized to serve the liberation of the nation.

Thus far, I have identified two distinct representations of women in the films examined. The gendered representation of Third World women was limited to the confines of either national liberation, or a liberated image of the woman based on modernist values. Cinema being an elitist art form, was a venue for the transmission of such modernist values. Within the films screened at the AAFF, it seemed as though gender was only understood within these limitations, ultimately reflecting how gender was being used for the advancement of a Eurocentric understanding of modernity that reflects Nasser's aspirations for Cairo as a progressive city. Modernization was therefore represented on screen as a necessary rejection of the traditional, as seen in *The Nightingale's Prayer*. However, emancipation in the films screened at the AAFF was only possible through the figure of a male leader. In what follows, I will examine ongoing gender hierarchies that reflected the representation of masculinity in the films screened at the AAFF, namely through the figure of the male hero.

C. The Male Anti-Colonial Hero

The Nightingale's Prayer and *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* both glorify male protagonists and represent them as true heroes. To deconstruct the representation of masculinity portrayed in both films, I begin with the heroism of the leader incorporated in the character of Kattabomman. The man is portrayed as wise, forgiving and down to earth. He allows love to take place, surrenders himself to lashing when he is mistaken for a spy. For him, the justification is that "a king's pain for his subjects is joy" (Panthulu 1959). Additionally, he single-handedly fights and defeats tens of soldiers, and he is angry when his men save him instead of leaving him to honorably die on the battlefield. All that is good is portrayed in the character of Kattaboman: the loving, the forgiving and the strong. Even the end of his life is depicted with pride, courage and resistance. He is after all killed for rejecting foreign rule over his land. The architect similarly, even though a rapist, still manages to win Amna's love and is portrayed as a lover. This depiction of perfection in men in the films, even though in one the man has committed rape, reveals the gender discourses that the AAFF was propagating though some of the films screened.

The late feminist decolonial philosopher María Lugones (2007) wrote an article titled "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." Through her exploration of the colonial/modern gender system, Lugones traces the social changes caused by colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism. To understand these changes, she resorts to the place of gender in precolonial societies. She argues that the narrowing of the concept of gender to the control of sex, its resources, and products that resulted from colonialism, is the essence of gender domination. This has resulted in an ideology of modernity in which "race as gendered and gender as raced [manifest] in particularly differential ways for Europeans/whites and colonized/nonwhite peoples" (202). These disparities created two different sides of gender: a light side and a dark side. The light side is the modern/colonial, heterosexual and patriarchal side where gender relations between white bourgeois men and women are constructed. In this side, women are weak, in their minds and in their bodies. They are banned from control over means of production, and reproduce the class, including the colonial and racial standing of the bourgeois white men (206). The dark side, however, is violent. Here women are reduced to animality. Women racialized as inferior, the colonized women, were historically reduced into various versions of women in the service of global, Eurocentered capitalism. The separation between a dark and a light side of gender relations allows for an understanding of the collaboration between the white colonizing men and racialized colonized men against colonized women. Lugones argues that, ultimately, "the white colonizer constructed a powerful inside force as colonized men were co-opted into patriarchal roles" (200). The reimagination of nation-states post-colonialism did not break with these colonial gendered constructions. This was visible in the way gender was represented in the films screened at the AAFF.

In these two films, gender hierarchies were therefore clearly existent in representations of the male hero, on the one hand, and the female victim, on the other hand. Such representations mirrored the reality of the male-led regimes that emerged with the newly independent nation-states. This was particularly clear in the fight for leadership of the Third World. The political stage launched through Bandung advanced male figures as leaders of the Third World. Nasser was not the only one to acquire significant status nationally and transnationally. Other political figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, and Ahmed Sukarno, Indonesia's first President, were also regarded as anti-colonial Third World heroes (Prashad 2007: xvii). Such one-man show leadership – that lasted almost two decades for some – is reflected in the way masculinity is portrayed in the AAFF films examined here.

The films screened at the AAFF feed into the idea of the nation-state and nationalism as promoted by newly-emergent post-colonial regimes. Shafik, in her discussion of rape in popular Egyptian cinema during the Nasser era, argues that Egypt could, in these films, be compared to "a formerly colonized 'raped' female nation that has eventually come to find its male rescuer in the anticolonial national hero Gamal Abdel Nasser" (2007: 8). The figure of the male hero Nasser cannot be dissociated from the image of modernity that Egypt was perpetuating. Such discourses, as advanced through some of the films screened at the state-sponsored AAFF, were reflections of discourses furthered in the newly emergent postcolonial nation-states.

The Nightingale's Prayer and *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* as case-studies served to examine the discourses on nationalism and gender that postcolonial nation-states were reproducing. The association between nationalism and gender on screen was also perpetuated off screen through Third World feminism. State feminism in Egypt during the Nasser era was premised on Eurocentric discourses, even though the feminists purportedly rejected them. The image of modernity that the Nasser regime tried to advance was clearly projected onto culture and through cinema as well. Such an image of modernity cannot be dissociated from the reality of the postcolonial newly-emergent nation-states that relied on male elite leaders. Nationalism, gender and modernity were an integral part of the Nasser regime's definition of progress and anti-imperialism. In the next chapter, I turn to the press reviews of the AAFF to examine the reception of the festival, and demonstrate how these modernization discourses that were reproduced through some of the films screened at the festival ultimately also led to the labelling of the festival as a failure.

CHAPTER V

NEGATIVE REVIEWS: FILM FESTIVALS AND THE MEANING OF SUCCESS

When examining primary source documents that pertain to the Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF), I came across articles that wrote negatively about the festival and portrayed it as a failure. I expected that the negative reviews of the AAFF would be related to the content of the festival, with criticism reserved for the films screened. Just as I demonstrated some of the AAFF's underlying limitations in terms of the portrayal of gender and modernity in the films, I expected that the festival would be critiqued for the themes it did or didn't advance. However, this was not the case with the reviews of the AAFF that I encountered, which categorically labelled the festival as a failure. It became increasingly important for me to ask what exactly went wrong for the AAFF to be a failure, a failure for whom, and what does the concept of failure entail. It became apparent that the AAFF was measured as a failure as it was held up to the European model of film festivals, which it attempted to reproduce. In what follows, I will therefore examine the history of European film festivals. I use Berlin, Cannes and Venice as one comparative entity to represent European film festivals for the purpose of this chapter, while I am aware of deeper historical differences between the three festival. I then move onto the press accounts to deconstruct their understanding of failure. I argue that failure can only be understood in relation to the aspirations towards modernity and progress that Nasserism, and the African-Asian anti-colonial movement more broadly aspired to. I will support this by revisiting the first edition of the AAFF held in Tashkent in 1958, which in contrast to the Cairo AAFF, was labelled as a success story in the press of the time.

Illustration 7 – Second Afro-Asian Film Festival announcement, featured in N/A, 1960, "Rawa'i' al-Intaj al-Sinima'I al-Duwali (Masterpieces of International Film Production)," *al-Ahram,* February 29, p.1.

A. The European Spectacle

All film festivals are constructed around the idea of the spectacle. The film scholar Marijke De Valck, in her book *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephelia* (2007) traces the history of the so-called Big Three film festivals:

Berlin, Cannes and Venice. De Valck argues that the first European film festivals laid the foundation for a new type of cinema industry:

> "Film festivals did not emulate the Hollywood studio model of vertical integration and aggressive export trade strategies, but would use Hollywood productions and its stars to add a festive and glamorous atmosphere to the events, which grew in status as the spectacles increased in their magnitude" (88).

The status and prestige of festivals as cultural events is built on the idea of popular attraction. Far off from the films being screened, the fanfare around the festival determines its success. The film stars are what set aside international film festivals, and festivals took advantage of the publicity these stars brought in. The Cannes Film Festival website, when describing the preparations for the first ever edition to be held in 1939 – which was eventually cancelled because of the beginning of the war – says:

> "two thousand invitations were sent out, and a transatlantic liner rented by Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) docked in the Bay of Cannes, with passengers including the American stars Tyrone Power, Gary Cooper, Douglas Fairbanks, George Raft, Paul Muni, Norma Shearer and Mae West on board. These distinguished first festival-goers reveled in a heady atmosphere of luxury and glorious sunshine" (Festival de Cannes 1939).

The presence of film stars was therefore incorporated in the founding structure of the very first film festivals held in the world. Before examining the reviews of the Cairo AAFF more closely, a closer look at the festival announcement featured on the front page of *al-Ahram* is worth further consideration (Illustration 7). The announcement states: "the heroes of each movie will be present at its screening party"

(N/A 1960e). This highlights the film stars and places them at the center of the festival. Spectacle, however, is also related to the number of films, as well as the number of nation-states participating. In the early 1960s, nation-states sent out their films to the festivals, as opposed to today's official festival selection committee. The AAFF announcement boasts that participants in the festival constituted a large group of Asian and African countries (N/A 1960e). In the early 1960s, African and Asian films had no to minimal participation in the biggest European international film festivals such as Cannes and Venice. Contrary to the common misconception, this was not due to low production numbers in the Third World. India's film production in the 1920s exceeded that of Great Britain, while the Philippines was making more than fifty films a year by 1930 (Shohat and Stam 2014: 28).

The most diversified European film festival for the time, the (West) Berlin International Film Festival, included some African, Asian and South American participation in their 1960 edition that ran from June 24 to July 5. The festival website explains that such diversity was highly criticized by the media that went so far as to signal the end of the festival: "the increase in the number of films from 'exotic' countries such as Pakistan, Korea, Thailand, Egypt and India was pitied as a mistaken humanitarian measure and slated as an 'attack on the ability to sit still'" (Berlinale 1960). Thus, the inclusion of a large number of films from the Third World was not yet tolerated, and festivals such as Cannes and Venice were reserved in the majority for films from Europe and the United States. During this blatantly racist era of film festivals, the AAFF held in Cairo was therefore boasting its considerable participation from the Third World in comparison to other international festivals. It was more diverse than the Venice Film Festival of 1960, for example, in which only six countries were participating in the Venice International Film Festival (France, Japan, USA, Italy, Yugoslavia and the UK).

Finally, the AAFF announcement stated that: "all films are recent and were produced in 1959 and 1960. They have not been screened in any other international film festival" (N/A 1960e). They were also described as the "masterpieces of international film production" (1960e). The festival was therefore screening not only the best films that were produced that year, but films that were being screened for the very first time in an international festival. Exclusivity is another aspect that set aside major film festivals. The organizers of the AAFF were keen on making the festival stand out. The announcement was not deceptive. *The Nightingale's Prayer* was screened at the AAFF before its screening at the Berlin International Film Festival's tenth edition in 1960.

Despite the fact that the AAFF was rejecting colonialism and imperialism, it nonetheless adopted all the components that made European film festivals a global success. Tailored according to a Eurocentric understanding of film festivals, the AAFF held in Cairo was also subject to the Nasser regime's modernity project. Standards of "success" associated with recognized film festivals in the early 1960s were therefore evident in the AAFF festival announcement. Popular attraction, large participation, never-screened-before films all constituted the recipe for success based on the European film festival model. The spectacle was consciously set up for a new modern film festival as taking place in Cairo. It was being tailored to fit in the ranks of the Big Three festivals. However, the discrepancies between the expectations in the announcement of the festival and the reality of the two weeks that followed it caused clear frustration in the press reviews, as I will now demonstrate.

B. Changing Attitudes and Conflicting Stances

What is very important in the overall examination of the press reviews is that all media outlets start very positively in the earlier days of the festival and progress negatively, revealing that the festival did not live up to certain expectations. Some articles in *Ruz al-Yusuf* showed great support of the festival, and particularly the African and Asian solidarity it enabled. In addition to the positive coverage stated in the first chapter of the thesis, *Ruz al-Yusuf* columnist Salah ʻAbd al-Sabur wrote in an article "Liqaʾ Asya wa Afriqya" (The Meeting of Asia and Africa): "the only way to let in healthy air is to open all the windows ... and here is a new window that opens, from which we can glance at the art of our two large continents" (1960: 33). The attitude of the press however becomes clearly contradictory as the festival progresses. An article in *Ruz al-Yusuf* written in the following issue is categorically entitled "al-Mahrajan al-Afriqi al-Asyawi al-Thani lil-Sinama.. Lam Yanjah!" (The Second Afro-Asian Film Festival … Did Not Succeed!) (N/A 1960k). The author ascribed this failure to "routine": "that beast with a thousand arms that spread to every office and body in our country" (1960k: 32). The argument the author advanced was that the government employees were to blame for the failure of the festival as they were not physically present in their posts when they needed to be. The article also added that the employees failed to distribute tickets to the relevant press which resulted in poor participation in the festival. Thus, it was the government employees' recklessness and irresponsibility towards the festival that led to its failure. Different media outlets ascribed the blame to other entities. From the film stars, to the audience, or even the Egyptian film producers, each press review found a different cause for the failure of the festival.

al-Ahram newspaper which was also critical of the AAFF, for example, attributed the cause of the failure to the film stars and Egyptian producers. An article read "Marrah Ukhra… Hadith Sarih ʿan Mahrajan al-Sinama!" (Once Again … An Honest Talk About the Film Festival!) (Editorial 1960b). This article was written two days after the closing ceremony and was meant as a frank summary of the limitations of the festival and shortcomings. The newspaper editorial stated: "The Ministry of [Culture and National] Guidance – no doubt – fulfilled its duty. The producers, the stars and the audience however… had a great role to play. The secret of the 'coldness' that dominated the atmosphere of the festival … is this role" (Editorial 1960b: 8). The author was clearly removing blame from the government and the Ministry of Culture and instead ascribing it to the producers and film stars who either did not send the right films to the festival or did not turn up to all the events. The editorial added: "When will this type of producer understand that our country is now committed to its position, its power and its reputation – to show their films in international festivals in which the world either rules in our favor or condemns us?" (1960b: 8). This editorial stands in stark contrast to the earlier articles, for example the *al-Ahram* article showing actors on the Nile happily gathering and engaging in conversations (N/A 1960d). So what exactly is the reason for this change in attitude towards the AAFF as the festival progressed?

The examination of these press reviews shows clear disappointment in the festival, and a change in attitude that began with great anticipation and ended with disappointment in perceived failure. This disappointment therefore stems from the high expectations appended to the AAFF. These were based on comparison with the first edition of the AAFF held in Tashkent in 1958. It seems that all these reviews were engaged in soul-searching as to why the AAFF in Cairo was not similar to the AAFF in

Tashkent – or not as good. For example, an editorial in *al-Ahram* newspaper was written one day before the closing ceremony. The title reads: "Ilhaqu Mahrajan al-Sinama wa law fi Akhir Ayyamihi" ("Catch" the Film Festival, Before it Ends) (1960a). Right under the title, one can read: "The secret of the "coldness" that surrounded the festival in Cairo… and the secret of the "warmth" that ignited it in Tashkent!" (1960a: 6). The editorial suggested that behind the so-called "coldness" of the Cairo AAFF lies its lack of "life." The opening ceremony was described as decorated by men in uniform instead of music and flowers. Additionally, as the festival progressed, the editorial claims that no one felt the presence of a "real festival" taking place in the city. In contrast to the Cairo AAFF, the editorial described the Tashkent AAFF as full of crowds, big receptions and loud music. Moreover, The *Times of India* correspondent from Cairo also compares the Cairo AAFF to the Tashkent AAFF (Khanna 1960). In an article entitled "Poor Response to Second Afro-Asian Film Festival: Of 32 Invitees Only Eight Participating," K. C. Khanna writes: "Numerically this is regarded as a shocking come-down by film circles here [in Cairo] since the first Afro-Asian Film Festival two years ago, when twenty nations had exhibited their cinematic wares in remote Tashkent" (1960: 10). The frustration is clear, and it is expressed in the differences between the Cairo and Tashkent editions of the AAFF.

Thus, the press reviews and reports begin with great anticipation for the potential of the AAFF, especially as it's the first international film festival to take place in Cairo. However, as the festival progresses, the reviews' enthusiasm beings to decline. The reasons for the alleged "failure" of the Cairo AAFF are conflicting. Every news outlet blames a different entity, whether the organizing committee, the film stars, or even the film producers. What is more surprising however, is that the reviews do not engage critically with any of the films screened. There is no mention whatsoever even of a single film screened. Despite the fact that the Cairo AAFF had all the components to make it a successful festival based on the European standard of film festivals, it nonetheless failed to reach another highly important standard for the Third World critics: Tashkent. The first edition of the AAFF held in Tashkent was evoked in the press reviews to criticize the festival in Cairo. The Tashkent AAFF is elevated in these reviews to an ideal of a film festival. However, there was a reason behind the Tashkent charm and success as a spectacle, to which I turn now.

C. Tashkent 1958 and the Meaning of Success

What the journalists failed to mention when comparing Cairo and Tashkent is that in Tashkent the first edition of the AAFF was not the only event taking place. The AAFF held in Tashkent in 1958 was accompanied by the Afro-Asian Writers Conference (AAWC). As the Russian studies scholar Rossen Djagalov argues, in his book *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema Between the Second and Third Worlds* (2020): “over a month before the inaugural Afro Asian Writers Congress in Tashkent, the city hosted another event, the First International Festival of African and Asian Film” (124). Djagalov’s book is a study of a festival that was inaugurated ten years after the AAFF and that used the same AAFF name in 1968. In his study, he examines the connections between the Soviet Union and the African-Asian anti-colonial movement, seeking to “demonstrate the degree of connectedness between the Soviet bloc and the Third-World project, thus putting the latter's non-alignment in question” (6). His criticism of the first AAFF held in Tashkent in 1958 is particularly interesting to examine. While the author considers the 1958 Tashkent

AAFF a “false start” to a sustainable film festival structure, he nonetheless brings to the fore interesting insights about the festival. Based on the examination of Soviet documents, Djagalov concludes that the 1958 Tashkent AAFF was an impressive yet incoherent and unsustainable festival:

> “Unlike the Writers Association, however, the [Afro-Asian Film] festivals did not result in permanent structures and wider networks being formed (each festival was run by a different country and bore little resemblance to the previous one, as testified by the different system of prizes: the Big Vase in Tashkent; the Golden Eagle in Cairo; Bandung, Patrice Lumumba, and other awards in Jakarta) and eventually fell victim to both Sino-Soviet rivalry and the CIA-backed coup that toppled one of the main sponsors of the event, the Indonesian government” (128).

Djagalov underscores how being run by a different Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) member state each time, rather than a centralized festival organization structure, made the AAFF dependent on the efforts, and more importantly, the budget, of the host country. Comparing the Tashkent and the Cairo edition of the AAFF would seem simplistic considering the place that the Soviet Union occupied on the world stage at the time, as well as its place in the global art scene and cinematic development more broadly.[13]

[13] Moscow’s All-Union State Institute of Cinematography was the first film school to be founded in the world in 1919. Soviet cinema was famous in the 1920s for the montage tradition that rejected classical storytelling. Directors in the 1920s such as Sergei Eisenstein were developing an experimental cinema aesthetic while conveying revolutionary ideals. In the 1930s, with the centralization of power, Soviet cinema was framed within socialist realism to be more accessible to the masses. Entertainment and propaganda were dominant in the 1930s. After the Second World War, patriotism and military heroism were on the rise, followed by an anti-American trend during the Cold War. It was in the 1960s that a break happened and a new cinema emerged that was less tied to previous models of state propaganda. See Anna Lawton, 1992, *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge) and Maria Belodubrovskaya, 2017, “Plotlessness: Soviet Cinema, Socialist Realism, and Nonclassical Storytelling,” *Film Histoy,* vol. 29, no. 3: pp. 169-192.

The Tashkent AAFF was a true spectacle as per De Valck's definition of the term discussed above. The city was immersed in consecutive African and Asian events. Tashkent was mobilized around a series of cultural gatherings that saw people come to the city from Africa, Asia and the whole world. Online videos by the newsreel producer British Pathé, archived on their website, give a clearer image of the grandiosity of the events. Large masses greet delegates as they arrive at the AAWC (N/A 1958b). Big posters hang all over the city, and fireworks announce the opening of the AAFF (N/A 1958a).[14] The Soviet Union had the financial means to fly in people from everywhere, even from the United States. An example is the presence of American singer, actor and political activist Paul Robeson at the AAFF. He is seen attending the festival and happily applauding (1958a).

The large participation in Tashkent and the fanfare that accompanied it cannot be understood as separate from Soviet interests in African and Asian nation-states as well as the anti-colonial movement more broadly. The Soviet Union provided financial incentives for Third-Worldist organizations. The Soviet Union provided financial incentives for Third-Worldist organizations. Djagalov describes this in terms of "the material and symbolic resources [that] the Soviet state could provide to their particular struggles" (2020: 5). This is not to disregard the commitment to communism and real interest in the Soviet Union as an alternative economic model for African and Asian states. The main point is that as a powerful super power, a film festival happening on Soviet soil without a doubt had much more resources to succeed on all levels required

[14] See "Asian and African Film Festival in Tashkent 1958," *British Pathé*, Accessed May 30, 2021: https://www.britishpathe.com/video/asian-and-african-film-festival-in-tashkent/query/african+asian+film+festival+tashkent and "The Tashkent Conference 1958," *British Pathé*, Accessed May 30, 2021: https://www.britishpathe.com/video/the-tashkent-conference/query/the+tashkent+conference.

for a film festival: technical, promotional, financial, artistic. Therefore, the Tashkent AAFF and the Cairo AAFF cannot be compared because of the discrepancy in power and global standing of the USSR and the UAR. This includes the incentive for mass participation in the Tashkent festival on the part of African and Asian nation-states.

Thus, in short, the Cairo edition of the AAFF as a cinematic experience was buried under "failure" as it was held up to the Tashkent edition standards. The criticism in the press was therefore beyond the realm of cinema – with no engagement with the films' themes, the acting, the technological innovation or the stories. This is arguably a tendency at film festivals, as film festivals are an event-oriented experience rather than a purely artistic one (de Valck 2007). Nevertheless, not discussing the films at all is problematic. Adjectives such as "boring," "weak," and lacking in "glamour" were used to advance the arguments of the reviews. The fact that the journalists did not all agree on the true reason for the alleged failure of the Cairo AAFF, in addition to the varied scapegoats in the reviews, demonstrates that what was at stake was not an issue with the festival as a cinematic experience as such. Instead, it is clear that there was frustration by the journalists writing about the festival in relation to what it did or didn't do vis-à-vis Cairo's position and standing as a Third World capital.

The festival announcement featured on the front page of *al-Ahram* clearly stated: "The festival's success is a great national victory for the country as it is the first international film festival to happen in Cairo" (N/A 1960e). This declaration suggests two things. On one hand, it emphasizes the success of this festival as affirmation of Egypt's status and standing within the African-Asian anti-colonial movement. On the other hand, it places Cairo on the international cinematic field. There is great significance in this for it indicates that the first international film festival to be held in

Cairo was expected to compete with film festivals globally. An article in al-Kawakib by Zaki Tulaymat (1960) wrote in anticipation of the AAFF: "the day is not far when Cairo, like "Cannes," "San Sebastian" and "Berlin," becomes a global center for conferences and film festivals" (36).

This is connected with Cairo's standing at the time of the second edition of the festival, and the role it attempted to play in terms of advancing Third-Worldist solidarity through hosting the AAFF. The frustration in the reviews emerged from great anticipation for Cairo as a modern cinema city. It also emerged because the point of reference for such criticism was the first AAFF held in Tashkent and the standards that were set by the Soviets. Becoming a global cinema player was therefore clearly an aspiration of the Nasser regime at the time. This was also to further Cairo's status as a global and modern city. Not living up to the Tashkent standard generated the resounding failure echoed by the media. This said, negative reviews such as these omit what I argue is the real epistemological value that the festival succeeded in advancing as part of the Third World project more broadly. I will now turn to examine these contributions in the final chapter.

CHAPTER VI

BEYOND FAILURE: RESISTANCE AND ALTERNATIVE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES

The films screened at the Cairo edition of the Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF) had limitations pertaining to gender and modernity as demonstrated above. The festival as a whole was criticized by the press for not living up to an ideal modern standard set by Tashkent. However, the AAFF offered a space for resistance to cultural hegemony that cannot be ignored. This resistance project created alternative epistemological possibilities. The AAFF should be considered as a counter-cultural project grounded in radical politics. What I argue in this last chapter is that the AAFF prefigured the emergence of an anticolonial cinema – namely the Third Cinema movement. To support this argument, I trace the historical connections between Third Cinema and the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO). I examine connections between the artists behind the films screened at the AAFF and with different AAPSO bodies. Additionally, I examine how the Afro-Asian film festivals throughout their editions challenged Hollywoodcentrism and opted instead for cultural contributions from and for the Third World. Despite the limitations of the AAFF, the Nasser regime enabled a space in Cairo for cultural enactment of Third World solidarity. Such a space is arguably a stepping stone for the later emergence of counter-cultural cinematic projects such as Third Cinema.

A. Prefiguring Third Cinema

Third Cinema is used to identify resistant cinema born in the late 1960s as a cultural manifestation of decolonization. The term was coined by Argentinian filmmaker and politician Fernando Solanas and Argentinian filmmaker and writer Octavio Getino in their article "Towards a Third Cinema" (1969). "Towards a Third Cinema" is a manifesto-like article in which Solanas and Getino expand the definition of this art form, the characteristics of revolutionary film, and emphasize the importance of merging arts and politics. The article is based on their own experience of making the 1968 film *La Hora de los Hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*).[15] They write a critically engaged article around their view of militant cinema as a necessary tool to fight colonialism. Solanas and Getino put the case for the active role of cinema as resembling guerilla warfare, and the function of the camera as compared to that of a gun. Their definition of Third Cinema is "cinema that recognizes in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point – in a word, the decolonization of culture" (2).

Third Cinema was only coined in the late 1960s, but it clearly had older historical roots. Shohat and Stam argue (2014) that "the notion of "Third Cinema" emerged from the Cuban revolution, from Peronism and Peron's "third way" in Argentina, and from such film movements as Cinema Novo in Brazil" (28). Aesthetically, Third Cinema relies on various cinematic movements ranging from Soviet montage to Italian neorealism. It was therefore no coincidence that Solanas and

[15] *The Hour of the Furnaces* is a 4 hour and 20-minute-long film divided into three parts which examine neocolonialism and violence, acts of liberation, violence and liberation, the colonial history of Argentina, Peronist rule and the meaning of violence during decolonization.

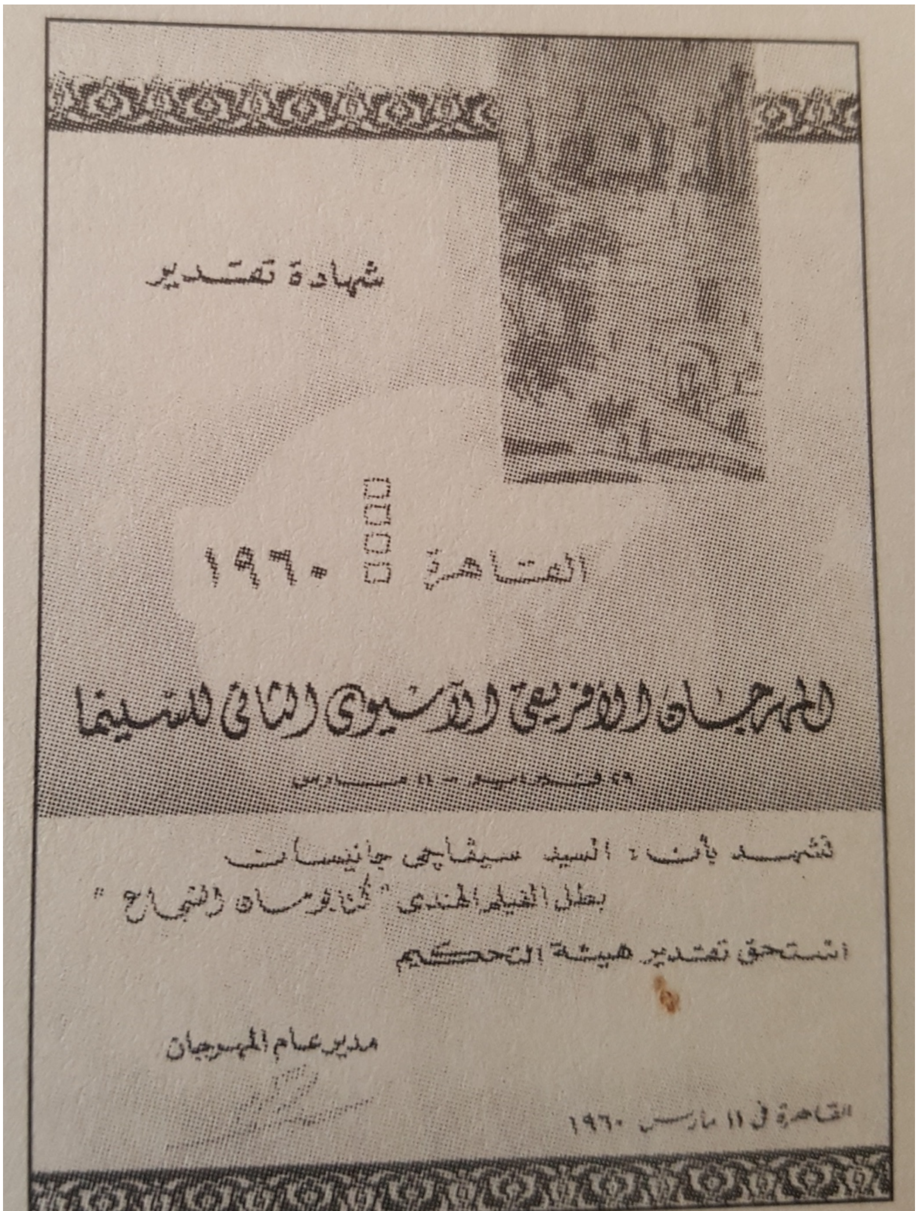
Getino's article coining the concept term would be written for *Tricontinental* – the journal of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL). OSPAAAL was established after the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in January 1966, and that was heralded as the South American extension to the African Asian anti-colonial movement. In 1965, the AAPSO elected Mehdi Ben Barka, Moroccan anti-colonial nationalist and political activist, to lead the preparations for the Tricontinental Conference, set to bring South America into the AAPSO framework (George 2020: 127). Historian Fernando Camacho Padilla and Latin American studies scholar Eugenia Palieraki, in their article "Hasta Siempre, OSPAAAL!," written on the occasion of Cuba deciding to close OSPAAAL after fifty-three years, argue that OSPAAAL was "an attempt to expand the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) to Latin America" (2019: 412).

Thus, in view of the above, it could be argued that Third Cinema was related to the African-Asian anti-colonial movement, or at least borne from its anti-colonial and Third Worldist ideologies. This inherent connection is very important as it demonstrates that AAPSO laid the foundations for the later emergence of cultural resistance beyond Africa and Asia. The different iterations of the AAFF, it could be argued, were the early stepping-stones for filmmakers to engage with questions of colonialism and imperialism, and to underscore colonial cultural hegemony. The films screened at the Cairo AAFF, as demonstrated above, had limitations that were previously analyzed. However, they were also films that broke with cinema from the colonial period as they were produced and included artists from the Third World and for the Third World.

Today, the definition of a Third Cinema is wide-ranging. While some define it as films adhering to a certain ideological project despite where they were produced

(Willemen 1989), others define it as all films produced in the Third World regardless of the time period (Shohat and Stam 2014). Shohat and Stam see Third Cinema as "overlapping circles of denotation" (28) that could be as broad as all productions of Third World peoples despite their adherence to different ideological structures. If we are to apply this definition, then films created by Africans and Asians, and by definition all films screened at the AAFF, are to be considered a constituting realm of Third Cinema. While the definitions are varied and broad, the essence that remains from the Third Cinema movement is its contribution to a counter-cultural project that was born out of experiences of colonialism and a need for self-expression by the colonized. Third Cinema, when understood as knowledge from and for the Third World, is capable of opening up bigger questions on knowledge production and cultural hegemony. Shohat and Stam warn against taking Europe as the culture of reference in an "unaided" linear history of progress in the arts (1998). Resistance to cultural hegemony is essential to examine through Third cinema but also through the contributions advanced by the AAFF and the AAPSO more generally, that preceded it.

Thus, born from anti-colonial and Third Worldist ideologies, Third Cinema had historical connections to the Afro-Asian anti-colonial movement. It was written for a journal of OSPAAAL, the extension of AAPSO to South America. Third cinema was therefore born out of the same colonial critique that was being advanced by AAPSO and consequently by the AAFF. Such connections demonstrate that the AAPSO, and AAFF, prefigured Third Cinema. Contributions that Third Cinema, and before it the AAFF, advanced in terms of resistance to cultural hegemony are similar. The solidarity that AAPSO allowed between artists and activists is highly important to understand the process that started off with Afro-Asian film festivals and ended in a well-defined cinema movement from and for the Third World, namely Third Cinema. In what follows I will examine the network of resistance that AAPSO arguably allowed for.


شهادة تقدير

القاهرة ١٩٦٠

المهرجان الافريقي الآسيوي الثاني للسينما

نشهد بأن : السيد سيفاجي جانيسان

بطل الفيلم الهندي

استحق تقدير هيئة التحكيم

مدير عام المهرجان

القاهرة في ١١ مارس ١٩٦٠

Illustration 8 – Second Afro-Asian Film Festival, Appreciation Certificate to Sivaji Ganesan, lead actor in the Indian film Veerapandiya Kattaboman, featured in Ganesan, Sivaji, 2007, Autobiography of an Actor, Chennai: Sivaji Prabhu Charities Trust.

Illustration 9 – Meeting between Sivaji Ganesan, lead actor in the Indian film *Veerapandiya Kattaboman*, and Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt, in India, featured in Ganesan, Sivaji, 2007, *Autobiography of an Actor*, Chennai: Sivaji Prabhu Charities Trust.

B. Network of Resistance

The films screened at the AAFF had larger connections to the African-Asian anti-colonial movement. When examining *The Nightingale's Prayer*, I noticed that it is based on a literary adaptation of a novel by the Egyptian writer Taha Husayn. Husayn is considered one of the pioneering modern literary figures in Egypt. He was involved in the first AAPSO conference. He was a member of the Egyptian Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee created in preparation for the meeting (US CIA 1958: 9). He also gave a speech at the plenary meeting of the first AAPSO conference highlighting cultural cooperation between Egypt and countries of Africa and Asia while emphasizing the history of such exchange (AAPSO 1958: 199). Moreover, Husayn was an active member of the Afro-Asian Writers Association (AAWA). The AAWA published the journal *Lotus*, a trilingual publication of Asian and African writers and anti-colonial activists. Husayn, as an Egyptian writer, is also the recipient of the Lotus prize in 1971, which he won alongside Sembene Ousmane from Senegal and Sonomyn Udval from Mongolia (Djagalov 2020: 210). The Lotus prize was a significant literary prize awarded once a year by the AAWA and was given to major African and Asian writers such as Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish or South African Alex Laguma.

The fact that Husayn is connected to the AAFF, the AAWA and the Egyptian Afro-Asian Committee that prepared the first AAPSO in Egypt is telling of the centralized nature of the movement, but also of the activism that these artists engaged in culturally and in overlapping ways within it. Moreover, a couple of days after the inauguration of the Cairo AAFF, and while it was still running, a meeting was held in preparation of the Afro-Asian Women's Conference that was going to be held on April 20, 1960 and as per the recommendation of the first AAPSO Conference (N/A 1960c). A permanent secretariat to advance women's rights was formed. The meeting was attended by numerous delegates from African and Asian countries. There is no way of telling whether some of these delegates were participating in the AAFF, but it is highly probable considering that these events were overlapping.

Another example of interconnected resistance networks is a connection I was able to draw between Sivaji Ganesan, lead actor in *Veerapandiya Kattaboman* and president Nasser. Ganesan (2007) writes in his biography that he was awarded best actor in the AAFF. He recalls in detail how honored he was to be receiving the award (Illustration 8). He also writes that he visited Nasser's home and was greeted by the first lady.

However, Nasser was in Syria at the time of the festival, and so Ganesan never had the chance to meet with him in Cairo.[16] Disappointed, he invited Nasser to be his guest on his next trip to India and asked the first lady to help him fulfill this wish. Ganesan states that Nasser indeed visited India sometime after the festival, without mentioning the exact date of the trip. Ganesan recalls that he wrote the Prime Minister at the time, Jawaharlal Nehru, and asked to be allowed to invite Nasser to be his guest and spend time with him and his family. Ganesan invited other actors as well and said that they will all attend the meeting. The government gave Ganesan two hours with Nasser. The latter was presented with a shield and was thanked for the awards for *Veerapandiya Kattabomman* at the Cairo AAFF (Illustration 9). Ganesan adds in his biography: "Although the allocated time was only two hours, Nasser spent three hours with me. He was very appreciative of my talent and this was another unforgettable event" (2007: 131).

These connections demonstrate the importance that was attributed to culture as a means to propagate African-Asian solidarity by heads of states, and the involvement of important figures from the cultural sphere of the time to further this cause. This reinforces the idea that the African-Asian movement was not only show of diplomatic solidarity. It also created a network of interconnected artists, filmmakers, actors and other cultural workers that all saw themselves to be serving the same cause. Most importantly, they spoke different languages. Ganesan writes about *Veerapandiya Kattabomman*'s reception at the Cairo AAFF:

[16] Nasser was in Syria attending festivities for the anniversary of the unification of Egypt and Syria under the UAR. Lebanese diplomats such as Sulayman Franjiyyah and Kamal Junblat are seen shaking hands with Nasser on the front cover of *al-Ahram* one day after the inauguration of the AAFF in Cairo. See N/A, 1960S, "Abdel Nasser Yashhad Mahrajan al-Furusiyyah fi Dimashq (Abdel Nasser Attends the Furusiyyah Festival in Damascus)," *al-Ahram*, March 1, p. 1.

> "As Kattaboman I defied the British, insulted and heaped scorn on them. These scenes evoked equal applause from the Egyptian audience as it did from the Tamilans. Although they did not understand the language, they were emotional and started clapping. There was a reason behind this, they felt a great degree of empathy having just won their independence from the British." (2007: 129).

What Ganesan writes in his biography is very important to understand the common struggle that people of Africa and Asia perceived each other to share at the time. Language indeed occupied an important role in the Cairo AFFF and was mentioned in the press. One article in *al-Kawakib* notes that "sign language was the only language of understanding among all" (N/A 1960i). Yet, despite these communication difficulties, "art is the language that all people understand" (N/A 1960i). Another article by al-Sawi (1960) states that "if language problems hinder the spread of books, for example, the expression of images in cinema facilitates their spread among different peoples, and this is the closest way to their understanding and therefore to their cooperation" (4). African-Asian solidarity and unity was a broad global aspiration for "unity across difference," (Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective 2018) based on a perceived common experience of colonialism.

Resistance was noticeable through forged connections between different AAPSO organizational structures, and in the relationships between artists and leaders. It was also noticeable in the common experience of struggle despite language barriers. AAPSO therefore relied heavily on cultural activists and gave them a space to express solidarity and resistance to ongoing systems of oppression through its various structures. Nasser's politics and the Egyptian state offered Cairo as a space for such connections to develop and take shape. The web of resistance created through the AAFF allowed for a network for artists and activists to be established, with the support of states such as the Nasser regime. This is proof of the strong ties that were being created within the Third World and that would consequently allow for movements such as Third Cinema to emerge. Additionally, the AAFF did not only forge connections of resistance but also challenged Hollywoodcentrism, and thus Eurocentric cultural hegemony, which I now examine.

C. Challenging Hollywoodcentrism

The communication infrastructure of empire created a global distribution model in which the First World countries became transmitters and the Third World countries receivers. Shohat and Stam argue that this was intensified post-World War I "when US film distribution companies (and, secondarily, European companies) began to dominate Third World markets, and was further accelerated after World War II, with the growth of transnational media corporations" (2014: 30). The AAPSO saw US and European cultural hegemony as a threat. The resolutions and decisions of the first AAPSO included a section "On Cultural Exchange and Cooperation" (AAPSO 1958: 257). The resolutions urged African and Asian nations "to preserve their cultural heritage, both national and popular" (259) and reinstated that "the existence of colonialism in many parts of Asia and Africa hinders cultural cooperation and suppresses national culture" (258).

Challenge to Hollywood's hegemony, or "Hollywoodcentrism" (Shohat and Stam 2014: 29), was a dominant theme in the press reviews of the Cairo edition of the AAFF. For example, in his article for *al-Kawakib*, al-Sawi (1960) writes: "the festival is also a necessity to face the competition created by countries aiming at using cinema for different purposes." (4) He adds that "cinema is no longer a pleasure for a certain class of people, but has become an educational, orientational, national and entertainment necessity all at the same time" (4). Additionally, in his article for *Ruz al-Yusuf*, 'Abd al-Sabur writes:

> "American film is no longer the master of films. And the American school of filmmaking that is characterized by fast pace, excitement and elaborate craftsmanship, which does not care much about the content of the film, is no longer the only film school. Other schools grew in the land of Asia and Africa. These schools touch upon human and life problems. In them is that sequential calm rhythm that characterizes our calm oriental souls" (33).

It is interesting to read about a calm Third World cinema as opposed to the fast-paced Hollywood film. This echoes the aesthetics of Third Cinema that rest upon irregular narratives, and often very long films. In an article titled "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics" (1989) film scholar Teshome H. Gabriel elaborates on his understanding of Third Cinema aesthetics. Gabriel argues that Third Cinema challenges the linear narrative of Western films and emphasizes space over time whereas temporal manipulation is minimal making the films oftentimes longer. It is therefore interesting to read that what the media advocated for in their coverage of the AAFF is very similar to what would later become one of the aesthetics of Third Cinema. Additionally, 'Abd al-Sabur states that organizing cinematic exchange and local distribution is the best way to support the African and Asian industries. He also calls upon the boycott of the American film that "so far alone monopolizes the industry of our taste" (33). The boycott of Hollywood was also called upon in the third edition of the AAFF held in Jakarta in 1964.

The media studies scholar, Krishna Sen (2003), in an article entitled "What's 'Oppositional' in Indonesian Cinema?," seeks to draw a link between the Jakarta edition of the AAFF (1964) and oppositional cinema. Sen looks at two moments in Indonesian history, the early 1960s before the fall of President Sukarno, and the late 1990s before the fall of President Suharto. She questions whether films in the 1960s could really be considered "oppositional" considering that they were state-sponsored and therefore politically dominated by the state. She draws on the third edition of the AAFF hosted by Indonesia in 1964 to describe Third-Worldism through postcolonial Indonesian leader Sukarno's call for anticolonial solidarity. Sen points out that the festival called for the boycott of Hollywood films and generated a wave of artistic and political writings demanding the same. The challenge to Hollywood's hegemony therefore seems to be a pattern persisting throughout different editions of the AAFF. This is particularly interesting for it shows that there was a common thread mobilizing the AAFF within its different editions despite the fact that the organizing committee – and the hosting nation-state – changed.

When describing the Jakarta AAFF of 1964, the late Lebanese filmmaker Georges Nasr expressed disappointment in the lack of cinematic incentive in the festival. In an article in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Nahar* covering his participation in the festival in Jakarta, he writes: "the delegations at the festival were convinced that they were not attending a cultural festival but a political conference" (Editorial 1964). The controversy around the Jakarta AAFF lay in the fact that most countries participating by 1964 had nationalized cinema industries. Nasr claims that his film was the only film screened at the Jakarta AAFF that was not state-sponsored. The AAFF clearly took on a different turn in later years that coincided with a shift in the AAPSO towards more heavy-handed top-down state control. Despite these changes, the Afro-Asian film festivals were unique spaces for their time. The strong presence of political incentive in these festivals throughout their editions is what set them aside from different film festivals, and most probably what generated a wave of Third World film festivals to emerge later on such as the biannual Carthage Film Festival established in Tunisia in 1966, or the Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) established in Burkina Faso in 1969. Before the emergence of the AAFF, there was no space in the Third World for African and Asian cinema to meet and to cooperate.

The foundation for the emergence of Third Cinema was being forged through the AAPSO and the AAFF more specifically. The creation of networks for artists, activists and filmmakers that the AAPSO allowed within its structure was essential for the emergence of a solidarity capable of generating a cinematic movement. Challenging pre-existing cultural hegemony was already an integral part of the Afro-Asian film festivals in their numerous editions. This is proof of the enduring cultural process that was forged in the AAFF and, later, manifested through Third Cinema. The Cairo AAFF while being a project curated by the Egyptian state, was nevertheless able to pave the way for counter-cultural projects grounded in radical politics as enabled and supported by the Nasserist regime. The AAFF was of course as a result strategically used for a political agenda that would posit Cairo as the capital for the Third World. Nation-states therefore enabled a space for African and Asian solidarity to manifest. Additionally, they enabled a space for African and Asian cinema industries to meet and cooperate. When perceived as a process, and through a repeated pattern, the epistemological possibilities created through the multiple film festivals cannot be ignored. The historical trajectory of cinema and culture in an era of anti-imperialist struggle demonstrates connections between the film festivals and the emergence of Third Cinema as a counter-cultural movement.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: HISTORY AND MEMORY

The Afro-Asian Film Festival (AAFF), through Nasser's investment in Third Worldist solidarity, carved a cultural space in Cairo for the re-imagination of Egypt and Cairo as a hub of transnational African-Asian arts and culture. At the same time, and also because of the Nasser regime, Cairo was already a pan-Arab cultural capital for arts and film. Since the 1952 coup that brought the Free Officers, including Nasser, to power, the state was using music and other forms of artistic expression to promote its pan-Arab nationalist ideology.

The AAFF was therefore a space in which pan-Arabism and Afro-Asianism actively engaged and opened up new possibilities for solidarity. The top-down nature of the festival led to its failure in different ways. The films screened had some limitations in their representation of gender and modernity. Such limitations were present in multiple Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) entities, particularly in terms of the parallel representation of women's and national liberation. These shortcomings were based on the modern/colonial system that the newly independent African and Asian nation-states were modelled upon and are a part of. The AAFF, as a state-sponsored film festival, mirrored these structural limitations through representations of gender and nationalism in the service of modernization. In Egypt, modernization was a way in which to position Cairo as a progressive Third World capital.

Furthermore, and as demonstrated, the press reviews of the festival were overwhelmingly negative. Reviews compared the Cairo AAFF to the first edition of the

AAFF that took place in Tashkent in 1958 without engaging with the cultural aspects of the festival or the films screened. The strong disappointment and frustration expressed in these reviews pointed towards the perceived failure of Cairo to attain the modern ideal of the progressive city, which was one of the aspirations of the Nasser regime. The comparison between the Soviet-sponsored Tashkent festival and the Cairo AAFF was a clear source of frustration in the press reviews. Despite these limitations, the Cairo AAFF advanced alternative epistemological possibilities that deserve to be highlighted. The artists behind the films screened at the festival demonstrated strong connections with the rest of the African-Asian movement. They were examples of the strong solidarity that manifested and was enabled through culture at the time. Additionally, there was a strong political incentive to reject Eurocentric cultural hegemony and encourage African-Asian collaboration throughout multiple editions of the festival. The stage that the AAFF offered through the AAPSO was unprecedented in the Third World and arguably allowed for radical and oppositional cinema to emerge in later years, namely Third Cinema.

The Cairo AAFF, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, offers an important contribution to our understanding of Third World solidarity. As a space for artists and activists to come together, it created an important hub for cultural resistance at a time of ongoing state-sponsored struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism. The Third World project was not only an arena for diplomats to come together but a much more complex network of people from different countries and continents. As Prashad argues: “The Third World project (the ideology and institutions) enabled the powerless to hold a dialogue with the powerful, and to try to hold them accountable. Today, there is no such vehicle for local dreams” (2007: xviii-xix).

Today, all editions of the AAFF remain buried within scarce pages in magazines and newspapers. No serious academic study has been taken to try and understand the contributions that these film festivals historically had.[17] The Cairo AAFF was clearly looking to a certain Eurocentered ideal of modernity to emulate, whether through the way Cairo attempted to market itself, through the topics raised in some of the films, or the disappointment in the press reviews. These reveal the limitations within which the festival was operating. However, when these are the only remnants of the festivals that are left to examine, and when the only accounts are those of male journalists, they open up questions about history, knowledge production and forgetting. By removing archives from their contexts and claiming them to be history, a real distortion of the truth happens. Bhambra (2007) argues that history is not just about examining the past but about finding the discourses that shaped it, for history is produced. She elaborates on archives stating that:

> "The bias of these texts, for our purposes, does not reside simply in the bias of their authors, but in the refusal of historians to demonstrate what appears to be obvious in them; the bias is in the failure to acknowledge the contestability of the archive and to regard it simply as a neutral repository of facts which can be pieced together to construct History without sustained examination" (26).

While conducting research for this thesis, I noticed that the 1960s was theorized as a decade of cultural shifts. Different cinema movements emerged during this period. Wong (2011) and De Valck (2007) use this decade to define decisive shifts in film

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[17] A forthcoming book by Routledge features an article that examines the AAFF circuit and constitutes the first such article in the literature, see Elena Razlogova, 2021, "Cinema in the Spirit of Bandung: The Afro-Asian Film Festival Circuit, 1957-1964," in *The Cultural Cold War and the Global South: Sites of Contest and Communitas*, edited by Kerry Bystom, Monica Popescu and Katherine Zien (London: Routledge).

festival culture. The African-Asian anti-colonial movement is however disregarded from these accounts. The Afro-Asian film festivals are nowhere to be found in historical accounts, nor as potential drivers of global shifts. In an era of anticolonialism and national liberation, the African-Asian anti-colonial movement had valuable contributions on the cultural and on the political level. These deserve to be advanced and to be seriously acknowledged, examined, and critiqued. There is a lot to unpack from such transnational exchange at the time of an emergence of independent nation-states.

With the absence of any critical engagement with the Afro-Asian film festivals in the literature, making these film festivals an object of study is a first step to challenging dominant Eurocentric historical hegemony, and enabling a space for the examination of Third World projects that emanated from and for the African and Asian world. This research continues to be today critical for our understanding of the African-Asian history of resistance and its repercussions for the present era. In her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), the Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith asks why is it important to revisit history, if history is about power, the powerful, and how they use their power to keep their positions. Her answer is that history is a form of resistance revisited, it is a search for justice, unfinished business, and history of ongoing colonialism. I will end with this statement, hoping that this thesis was able to somehow defy dominant histories and resist them.

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